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THE COURT OF LOUIS XIV.

QUEEN MARIE-THÉRÈSE.

WOMEN OF VERSAILLES

THE

COURT OF LOUIS XIV.

BY

IMBERT DE SAINT-AMAND

TRANSLATED BY

ELIZABETH GILBERT MARTIN

WITH PORTRAITS

NEW YORK
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THE COURT OF LOUIS XIV.

INTRODUCTION

I

RARELY has a city presented a spectacle so striking as that afforded by Versailles during the struggle of the army against the Commune. Between the grand century and our epoch, between the majesty of old France and the intestine broils of new France, between the dismal horrors of which Paris was the scene and the radiant souvenirs of the city of the Sun-King, there was a contrast as painful as it was startling. Those avenues where one might see the head of the government and the illustrious defeated man of Reichshoffen, that place of arms encumbered with cannons, those red flags, sad trophies of the civil war, which were taken to the Assembly as tokens of mourning as well as of victory, that magnificent palace whence seemed to issue a suppliant voice adjuring our soldiers to save so fair a heritage of historic splendors and national grandeurs, all filled the soul with profound emotion.

At that hour of anguish when men experienced a but too well-founded anxiety as to what was to become of the hostages; when they knew that Paris was the prey of flames, and wondered whether a heap of cinders might not be all that would remain of the modern Babylon, the capital of the world,— the Pantheon of all our glories seemed to reproach us and excite us to remorse. The France of Charlemagne and of Saint Louis, of Louis XIV. and of Napoleon, protested against that odious France which the men of the Commune had the pretension to call into existence on the ruins of our honor. We seemed then the sport of an evil dream. There was something strange and unwonted in the noise of arms which disturbed the approaches of this chateau, the calm and majestic necropolis of absolute monarchy, whose chapel seemed, as one might say, to be its catafalque!

Even in those cruel days whose souvenirs will never be effaced from my memory, I was incessantly haunted by the shade of Louis XIV. I had at the time a desire to revisit his apartments. They were partially occupied by the personnel of the Ministry of Justice and the Assembly Committees. But the chamber of the great King had been respected, and no functionary had ventured to transform the sanctuary of royalty into an office. In our democratic century I did not contemplate without respect this chamber where the sovereign *par excellence* died like a king and a Christian. What reflections did not

the incomparable Gallery of Mirrors arouse in me! At intervals of several days it had been a hall of triumph, an ambulance, and a dormitory. There, surrounded by all the German princes, our conqueror had proclaimed the new German Empire. There the wounded Prussians of Buzenval had been carried. There the deputies of the National Assembly had slept in the early days of their coming to Versailles.

Sad vicissitudes of destiny! This glittering gallery, this asylum of monarchical splendors, this place of ecstasy, of apotheosis, where the pencil of Lebrun has revived the splendors of paganism and mythology, this modern Olympus where the imagination evokes so many brilliant phantoms, where French aristocracy comes to life again with its elegance and pride, its luxury and courage, this gallery of fêtes which has been crossed by so many great men, so many famous beauties, in what painful circumstances, alas! was it granted me to revisit it. From one of the windows I saw that superb view in which Louis XIV. perceived nothing which was not himself; for this garden, created by him, filled the entire horizon. My eyes rested on this vanquished nature; these waters brought hither by dint of art, and gushing in none but regular designs; on this vegetable architecture which prolongs and completes the architecture of stone and marble; on these shrubs which grow with docility under line and square. I compared the harmonious regularity of the park to the incoherent art of revolutionary epochs, and at the mo-

ment when the star which Louis XIV. had taken for his device was about to sink below the horizon, like the symbol of departed royalty, I said to myself: This sun will reappear to-morrow as radiant as superb. O France, will it be the same with thy glory?

I was then preoccupied with him whom Pelisson styled the visible miracle, the potentate in whose honor the possibilities of marble, bronze, and incense were exhausted, and who, to use one of Bossuet's expressions, has not even had possession of his sepulchre. Has God, I asked myself, pardoned him that Asiatic pride which made him a sort of Belshazzar or Christian Nebuchadnezzar? What notion does the sovereign who sang with tears of emotion the hymns composed in his honor by Quinault, now entertain of earthly grandeurs? Is his soul still affected by our interests, our passions, or is this world a grain of sand, an atom in the immense universe, too paltry to win attention from those who have fathomed the mysteries of eternity? What does the great King think of his Versailles, the temple of absolute royalty, which was to be its tomb before time should have darkened its gilded ceilings? What is his opinion of our discords, our miseries, and our humiliations? He who retained so bitter a memory of the troubles of the Fronde, what judgment does he pass on the excesses of existing democracy? Did his French and royal soul shudder when, in this hall decorated with pictures of his triumphs,

the new master of Strasbourg and Metz restored that empire of Germany which France had taken centuries to destroy? What a contrast between our reverses and the superb frescoes which adorn the ceiling! Victory extends its rapid wings. Renown blows its trumpet. Borne upon a cloud and followed by Terror, Louis XIV. holds the thunderbolt in his hands. The Rhine, which had been resting on its urn, rises in amazement at the speed with which the monarch traverses the waters, and drops its helm through fright. Conquered cities are personified as weeping captives. This wounded lion is Spain; Germany is that eagle flung to earth. Even while gazing mournfully at these dazzling and ostentatious paintings, I recalled these words of Massillon: "What remains to us of these great names which formerly played so brilliant a part in the universe? We know what they were during the little interval their splendor lasted, but who knows what they are in the eternal region of the dead?"

With my mind full of these thoughts I descended that marble staircase at the head of which Louis XIV. had awaited the aged Condé, enfeebled by years and wounds, and mounting it but slowly: "Do not hurry yourself, cousin," said the monarch to him, "one cannot go up very fast when, like you, he is burdened by so many laurels."

In the evening I wished to see again the statue of the great King whose memory had so keenly impressed me throughout the day. The night was

serene. Its sweet and meditative beauty inspired regret for the furies and disturbances of men. Its silence was interrupted by the noise of the fratricidal artillery which thundered in the distance. It seemed to be in honor of Louis XIV. that the sentinels mounted guard in this place where he had so often reviewed his troops. By the light of the stars I contemplated the majestic statue of him who was more than a king. On his colossal horse he appeared to me like the glorious personification of the right which has been called divine.

Republican or monarchical, France should disown no part of a past like this. The history of such a sovereign can but inspire her with lofty ideas, with sentiments worthy of her and of him as well. He struggled to the last against the powers in coalition, and when that unique word, *the King*, was pronounced in Europe, every one knew what monarch was intended. Ah! that statue is truly the image of the man accustomed to conquer, to dominate, and to reign, of the potentate who overcame rebellion more easily with a glance than Richelieu with the axe.

Let the leaders of the revolutionary school try in vain to scratch this imperishable bronze with their puny nails. The mud they would like to fling at the monument will not even reach its pedestal. That night when the cannons of the Commune were answering those of Mont-Valérien, the statue seemed to me more imposing than usual. One might have thought it animated like that of the Commander.

The gesture was somehow haughtier and more imperious than in less troublous times. Staff in hand, the great King, looking toward Paris, seemed to be saying to the insurgent city, like the marble guest to Don Juan: Repent.

II

THE profound impression which was made on me by Versailles during the days of the Commune is far from having been weakened since that moment. Very unlooked-for circumstances caused the Queen's apartments to be occupied more than a year by the political administration of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. My modest work-table was placed for a year at the end of the hall of the Grand-Couvert, opposite the picture which represents the Doge Imperiali humbling himself before Louis XIV., and I had time to reflect on the strange vicissitudes, the caprices of destiny, in consequence of which the employees of the Ministry, among whom I was, had been camped, as it were, in the middle of these legendary halls.

The five rooms which compose the Queen's apartment all possess importance from the historic point of view. The most curious souvenirs attach to each of them. You have just ascended the marble staircase. There is a door at your right, which you enter. It is the hall of the Queen's guards. It was here, at six o'clock in the morning of October

6, 1789, that the body-guards, victims of popular fury, defended so courageously the entry to Marie Antoinette's apartment against a band of assassins. The next hall is that of the Grand-Couvert, where the queens dined ceremoniously in company with the kings. These formal banquets took place several times a week, and the public were admitted to be spectators of them.

Marie Antoinette had submitted to this barbarous custom not merely when Queen, but also when Dauphiness. "The Dauphin dined with her," says Madame Campan in her Memoirs, "and each household of the royal family had its public dinner every day. The ushers admitted everybody who was neatly dressed; this spectacle delighted the provincials; at the dinner hours one met nobody on the staircases but honest folks who, after having seen the Dauphiness eat her soup, were going to see the princes eat their boiled beef, and who would then run breathlessly to see Mesdames eat their dessert."

Next to the hall of the Grand-Couvert comes the Salon of the Queen. The sovereign's drawing-room was held here, and the presentations made. Her seat was placed at the foot of the hall, on a platform covered with a canopy, the screw-rings of which may still be seen in the cornice opposite the windows. Here shone the famous beauties of the court of Louis XIV. before the King took to confining himself to Madame de Maintenon's apartments. Hither came incessantly President Hénault and the

Duke de Luynes to chat with that amiable and good Marie Leczinska in whom every one took pleasure in recognizing the virtues of a woman of the middle classes, the manners of a great lady, and the dignity of a queen. Here Marie Antoinette, the sovereign with the figure of a nymph, the gait of a goddess on the clouds, the sweet yet imperious aspect befitting the daughter of Cæsars, received, with that royal air of protection and benevolence, that enchanting prestige the wondrous memory of which foreigners carried throughout Europe.

The next room is that which evokes more memories than all the others. Perhaps there is in no other palace a hall so adapted to impress the imagination. It is the Queen's bed-chamber, the chamber where two queens have died, Marie Thérèse and Marie Leczinska, and two dauphinesses, the Dauphiness of Bavaria and the Duchess of Burgundy, — the chamber where nineteen princes and princesses of the blood have been born, among them two kings, Philip V., King of Spain, and Louis XV., King of France, — the chamber which for more than a century beheld the great joys and supreme agonies of the ancient monarchy.

This chamber has been occupied by six women: first by the virtuous Marie Thérèse, who was installed there May 6, 1682, and breathed her last sigh there, July 30, of the following year; afterwards by the wife of the Grand Dauphin, the Bavarian Dauphiness, who died there April 20, 1690, at the age of

twenty-nine; then by the charming Duchess of Burgundy, who entering it on her arrival at Versailles, brought into the world there three princes of whom only the last one lived and reigned under the title of Louis XV., and died there, February 12, 1712, at the age of twenty-six; next by Marie Anne Victoire, Infanta of Spain, who was affianced to the young King of France, and who lived there from June, 1722, until April, 1725, when the projected marriage was broken off; next by the pious Marie Leczinska, who was installed in this chamber December 1, 1725, gave birth there to her ten children, lived there during a reign of forty-three years, and died there June 24, 1768, surrounded by universal veneration; and finally by the most poetic of all women, by her who resumes in herself all majesties and all sorrows, all triumphs and all humiliations, all joys and all tears, by her whose very name inspires emotion, tenderness, and respect,— by Marie Antoinette.

During a period of nineteen years, from 1770 to 1789, she occupied this chamber. Here were born her four children. Here she came near dying, December 20, 1778, when bringing her first daughter, the future Duchess of Angoulême, into the world. Custom demanded numerous witnesses at a sovereign's lying-in. An ancient and barbarous etiquette authorized the people to enter the King's palace under such circumstances. From early morning the approaches to the château, the gardens, the galleries of the Mirrors and the Œil-de-Bœuf, the Salons, and

the very chamber of the Queen, had been invaded by an indiscreet and noisy crowd. Ragged chimney-sweepers climbed upon the furniture and clung to the draperies. This tumult increased Marie Antoinette's sufferings. She lost consciousness and for three-quarters of an hour could not be revived. The stifling atmosphere of the room made the danger still greater. The windows had been listed on account of the season. Louis XVI., with a strength which nothing but his affection for Marie Antoinette could have given him, succeeded in opening them, although they had been fastened together by bands of paper from top to bottom. The Queen came to herself, and her husband presented her the newly born Princess. "Poor little one," she said to her, "you were not desired, but you shall not be less dear. A son would have belonged more especially to the State; you will be mine, you shall have all my attention; you will share my happiness and lessen my troubles."

It was here also that the two sons of the Martyr King and Queen saw the light of day: the one, born October 22, 1781, died June 4, 1789, at the beginning of the Revolution; the other, born March 27, 1785, under the title of Duke of Normandy, was afterwards styled Louis XVII.

In this truly memorable chamber began the long death agony of French royalty. Marie Antoinette was sleeping here on the morning of October 6, 1789, when she was awakened by the insurrection. At the further end of the chamber, underneath the panel on

which now hangs Madame Lebrun's portrait of the Queen, there is a little door which led, through an anteroom, to the Œil-de-Bœuf, and thence to the King's apartments. Through it the unhappy Queen, menaced by the rioters who assassinated the body-guards, escaped to seek refuge near Louis XVI. A few minutes later, she left Versailles, never more to see it. Since then, destiny has not permitted any woman to occupy the apartments of the Queen.

The year I spent in these rooms, so full of souvenirs, has left a strong and serious impression on my mind. Many a time, in winter days, at the hour when lights were brought, I seemed to see, like graceful phantoms, the illustrious women who have loved, wept, and suffered in this abode. Between the dead and the living there is more intercourse than people suppose; I have always believed that celebrated personages do not lose sight, from the height of the eternal spheres, of those who evoke their memory while essaying, as it were, to resuscitate them. Then these verses of Lamartine seemed to reach my ears like a faint, mysterious echo: —

"Ah! si c'est vous, ombres chéries,
Loin de la foule, et loin du bruit,
Revenez ainsi, chaque nuit,
Vous mêlez à mes rêveries." [1]

[1] Ah! if it be you, dear shades,
Far from the crowd, and far from noise,
Return thus every night,
And mingle with my reveries.

I recalled likewise the striking words of a priest, Père Gratry: "Does not the human race permit itself to say at present that the dead address detailed discourses to us by a conventional cipher composed of physical shocks on wood? Shall we not abandon these puerile illusions in order to cling to the sacred foundation of presentiment and faith which lends a certain credit to such chimeras? The human race feels and comprehends that all connection cannot be broken off between us and those who preceded us."

The society of the dead consoles the griefs caused by that of the living, and there are fewer deceptions beyond the tomb than on this side of it. During my stay at Versailles, I became especially impassioned for the two women who had enchanted two different epochs, the Duchess of Burgundy and Marie Antoinette. Both of them paid dear for the brief éclat of their triumph: one by an untimely death which the affrighted imaginations of her contemporaries were inclined to attribute to the effects of poison; the other by captivity and execution. It seems a law of destiny that all which goes beyond a certain medium in point of grandeur and prestige shall soon be expiated by exceptional calamities. Suffering is the inevitable chastisement of all who become conspicuous, as if the human creature were as little made for glory as for happiness. Ah! how many times I have been charmed, moved, fascinated, by these two dauphinesses who were the ravishing personification of grace and youth and beauty! I seemed to see

their faces. I thought I heard their voices. It seemed a salutary proximity.

This kind of dwelling with illustrious shades; this strange and unlooked-for dwelling in rooms forever famous; this long contemplation of a past full of instruction and of charm; this constant and involuntary evocation of figures poetic beyond all others,— in a word, this whole assemblage of circumstances, both singular and striking, inspired me with the first idea of the work I begin to-day. The advice of my dear master and friend, M. Feuillet de Conches; my conversations with the eminent curator of the Museum of Versailles, M. Eudore Soulié; the assiduous reading of the learned work which this indefatigable investigator has published under the title of *Notice*,— all confirmed me in my resolve, and I have attempted to sketch the heroines who may be called the *Women of Versailles*.

Doubtless their history is known. I have no pretension to write new biographies of Queen Marie Thérèse, the Marquise de Montespan, Madame de Maintenon, the mother of the regent, the Duchess of Burgundy, the Duchess of Berry, the sisters de Nesle, the Marquise de Pompadour, Madame Dubarry, the Princess de Lamballe, Madame Elisabeth. But I desire, without describing their entire career, to give an account of the part they played at Versailles, to mention with exactness the apartments they occupied there, to outline their daily existence in detail, to restore patiently the minutiæ of eti-

quette, to indicate what may be termed, to employ one of Saint-Simon's expressions, the mechanism of court life.

What I wish to attempt is the history of the château of Versailles by means of the women who dwelt there from 1682, the epoch when Louis XIV. definitely fixed his residence there, until October 6, 1789, the fatal day when Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette left it to return no more. Few periods are so curious to study as this one of a hundred and seven years. The sanctuary of absolute monarchy was to be its tomb, and the theatre of apotheoses was destined to be also that of humiliations and afflictions.

It is not merely the ancient memoirs, those of Dangeau, Saint-Simon, the Princess Palatine, and Madame de Caylus, for the reign of Louis XIV.; those of the Duke de Luynes, the advocates Barbier and Marais, of Duclos and Madame du Hausset, for that of Louis XV.; of Baron de Bezenval, Madame Campan, Count de Ségur, and Baroness Oberkirch, for that of Louis XVI., to which we shall recur in this labor. We shall also make use of the patient investigations of modern science, the researches of Sainte-Beuve, De Noailles, Lavallée, Walckenaër, Feuillet de Conches, Le Roi, Soulié, Rousset, Pierre Clément, Campardon, Goncourt, d'Arneth, Lescure, and many historians, many distinguished critics. Assuredly, there are many persons who are thoroughly acquainted with all these historic treasures. I have

no thought of instructing such erudite persons, and I know very well that I am but the obscure disciple of these masters.

But perhaps there are some worldly people who will not blame me for having studied so many works on their behalf, seeking through the women of the courts of three kings the resurrection of a past which present struggles cannot banish from our minds. My desire will be to repeople these deserted halls, to make the procession of the dead file by, to sum up briefly the lessons of morality, history, psychology, and religion which issue from the most grandiose of earthly palaces. May the women of Versailles be to me so many Ariadnes in this marvellous labyrinth!

III

Neither Mazarin's nieces nor la grande Mademoiselle, neither Henrietta of England nor the Duchesses of La Vallière and Fontanges, should be considered as women of Versailles. At the period when these heroines were shining in all their splendor, Versailles was not yet the official residence of the court and the seat of government. We do not begin this study until 1682, the year when Louis XIV., quitting Saint-Germain, his habitual abode, established himself definitively in the residence which he preferred.

During a century — from 1682 to 1789 — how many curious womanly figures will appear upon this

radiant scene! What vicissitudes in their destinies! What singularities and contrasts in their characters! 'Tis the good Queen Marie Thérèse, gentle, virtuous, resigned, making herself loved and respected by all honest people. 'Tis the imperious mistress, the proud sultana, the woman of brilliant, mocking, cutting wit, whose court is "the centre of pleasures, of fortune, of hope and of terror to the ministers and generals of the army, and of humiliation to all France," the haughty, the all-powerful Marquise de Montespan.

'Tis the woman whose character is an enigma and whose life a romance, who has known by turns all the extremities of good and evil fortune, and who, with more rectitude than openness of heart, more justice than grandeur, has at least the merit of having reformed the life of a man whose very passions had been extolled as if divine: Madame de Maintenon. 'Tis the Princess Palatine, the wife of Monsieur the King's brother, the mother of the future regent, ugly, correct in morals, cynical in the expressions of her correspondence, a frantic German, railing at her new country, impersonating Satire at the side of Apotheosis, exaggerating in her letters the rage of an Alcestis in petticoats, rustic and almost Diogenic, but witty, more pitiless, more caustic, more vehement than Saint-Simon himself, strange woman of the brusque, impetuous style — the style which, as Sainte-Beuve says, has a beard on its chin, and of which one can hardly say, when it is translated from

German into French, whether it most resembles Rabelais or Luther.

'Tis the Duchess of Burgundy, the sylph, the siren, the enchantress of the old King, the Duchess of Burgundy, whose premature death was the signal for the last agony of a court once so dazzling.

Then, under Louis XV., 'tis the sisters De Nesle who are infuriated for the heart of the young King, and who sometimes wrangle over their conquest, and sometimes unite their forces to reign in common. 'Tis the virtuous, the sympathetic Marie Leczinska who plays the same honorable but minor part with Louis XV. that Marie Thérèse had done with Louis XIV. 'Tis the Marquise de Pompadour who, in spite of the subtlety of her intelligence and the power of her attractions, always remains a parvenue, a magician accustomed to all the enchantments, all the marvels, all the refinements of elegance, but who, according to Voltaire, her apologist and courtier, is after all nothing more than a sort of grisette made for the opera and the seraglio.

'Tis Madame Dubarry, a low courtesan disguised as a countess, and destined by the irony of fate to shake the foundations of the throne of Saint Louis, of Henry IV., and of Louis XIV. Then, under the reign which is not the epoch of scandal and which is yet that of expiation, 'tis Madame Elisabeth, a nature essentially French, displaying not merely courage but gaiety in the most horrible catastrophes, Madame Elisabeth, the angel that heaven caused to

appear in the revolutionary hell; 'tis the Princess de Lamballe, the gracious and touching heroine of friendship and duty; 'tis Marie Antoinette, whose mere name is more pathetic, more eloquent, than all words.

In the careers of these women what historical instructions, and also what lessons in psychology and morals there are! What could make us better understand the court, "that region where joys are visible but false, and vexations hidden but real," the court "which does not give contentment and which does prevent its being found elsewhere"?[1] Do not all the women of Versailles say to us: "The condition which is apparently the happiest has secret bitternesses which corrupt all its felicity. The throne is like the lowest place in being the seat of torments; superb palaces hide cruel anxieties like the roofs of the poor and the laborious, and, lest our exile should become too pleasing to us, we feel everywhere and always that something is wanting to our happiness."[2]

A portrait by Mignard, engraved by Nanteuil, represents the Duchess de La Vallière with her children: Mademoiselle de Blois and the Count de Vermandois. She looks pensive, and is holding in her hand a reed pipe at the end of which floats a soap-bubble, with these words: Thus passes the glory of

[1] La Bruyère, *De la cour.*

[2] Massillon, *Sermon sur les afflictions.*

the world. *Sic transit gloria mundi.* Might not this be the device of all the heroines of Versailles?

The general impression arising from history is that of melancholy. The life of every celebrated woman is a commentary on Fontaine's line: —

"Ni l'or ni la grandeur ne nous rendent heureux."[1]

All is brilliant on the surface, all gloomy in the depths. The court beauties cannot dispel black care by waving their fans. There are more lees than nectar in their golden banqueting-cups. Their paint does not hide their pallor, and tears often flow in torrents under their masks. Just as splendid mausoleums hide the worms of the sepulchre beneath their ornaments of bronze and marble, so these sad hearts, garmented with brocade and gold, are abodes of secret tortures and excruciating agonies. They can all say with Madame de Sévigné, who was nevertheless rich, honored, brilliant, and seemingly happy: "I find death so terrible that I hate life more because it leads me thither than because of the thorns which bestrew it. Will you tell me then that I must wish to live forever? Not at all; but if my opinion had been asked, I would much rather have died in my nurse's arms; that would have rid me of many ennuis, and would have given me heaven very surely and very easily."[2]

[1] Neither gold nor grandeur makes us happy.

[2] Madame de Sévigné, Letter of March 16, 1672.

Apropos of the death of the Queen of Spain, the Princess Palatine, wife of the brother of Louis XIV., wrote: "I hear and see every day so many villanous things that it disgusts me with life. You have good reason to say that the good Queen is now happier than we are, and if any one would do me, as to her and her mother, the service of sending me in twenty-four hours from this world to the other, I would certainly bear them no ill will."[1]

Madame de Montespan was ill at ease even before that hour of great expiations when she was obliged, trembling with rage, to descend the marble staircase of Versailles, never again to mount it. As in the fairy tales, grand palaces, carriages with six horses, diamonds, and splendid attire sprang up under the feet of the resplendent favorite. And yet at the same time, Madame de Sévigné, always a skilled observer, wrote concerning the triumphant mistress who was the object of all favors and idolatries: "The attachment is still extreme, enough has been made of it to annoy the curé and every one else, but perhaps not enough for her, for there is something sad underneath her external triumph."[2]

The rival who, contrary to all expectation, supplanted Madame de Montespan; the prodigiously clever woman who, according to a very just expression of M. Capefigue, was for so many years the sick-

[1] Letters of the Princess Palatine, March 20, 1689.
[2] Madame de Sévigné, Letter of July 31, 1675.

nurse of a soul worn out with pride, love, and glory; Madame de Maintenon wrote in the midst of her own splendor to Madame de La Maisonfort: "Why cannot I give you my experience! Why cannot I make you see the ennui which devours the great, and the troubles that fill their days! Do you not see that I am dying of sadness in a fortune which could not be easily imagined? I have been young and pretty; I have enjoyed pleasures; I have spent years in intellectual intercourse; I have arrived at favor, and I protest to you, my dear child, that all conditions leave a frightful void."

Again it is Madame de Maintenon who said to her brother, Count d'Aubigné: "I can hold out no longer; I would like to be dead." It is she who, summing up all the phases of her surprising career, wrote to Madame de Caylus two years before her death: "One atones heavily for the pleasures and intoxication of youth. I find, in looking back at my life, that, since the age of twenty-two, which was the beginning of my fortune, I have not had a moment free from sufferings, and that they have constantly increased."[1]

The women of the reign of Louis XV. afford no fewer subjects for philosophical reflections. These pretended mistresses, who in reality are only slaves, seem to present themselves one after another like

[1] Letter of Madame de Maintenon to Madame de Caylus, April 19, 1771.

humble penitents who come to make their apologies to history and, like the primitive Christians, to reveal publicly the miseries, vexations, and remorses of their souls. They tell us what their doleful successes amounted to. Even while their triumphal chariot made its way through a crowd of flatterers, their conscience hissed cruel words into their ears. Like actresses before a whimsical and variable public, they were always fearing lest the applause might change into uproar, and it was with terror underlying their apparent coolness that they continued to play their sorry part.

Do not all the favorites seem to unite in repeating to us with Massillon: "Is it not true that the way of the world and the passions is yet more painful than that of the Gospel, and that the kingdom of hell, if one may say so, suffers still more violence than that of heaven?" If, among these mistresses of the King, there were a single one who had enjoyed her shameful triumphs in peace, who had called herself happy in the midst of her luxury and splendor, one might have concluded that, from a merely human point of view, it is possible to find happiness in vice. But no; there is not even one. The Duchess de Châteauroux and the Marquise de Pompadour are not happier than the Duchess de La Vallière and the Marquise de Montespan. "'O my God,' cried Saint Augustine, 'Thou hast ordained it, and it has never failed to happen, that every soul that is in disorder shall be its own torment. If we taste in it

certain moments of felicity, it is an intoxication which does not last. The worm of conscience is not dead; it is only benumbed. The alienated reason presently returns, and with it return bitter troubles, gloomy thoughts, and cruel anxieties.' "[1]

Unfortunate victim of a royal caprice, the young Duchess de Châteauroux, who lived but a day, "like the flowers of the field," condenses into her brief but tempestuous career all the miseries and deceptions of vanity, all the tortures and anguish of physical and moral pain. Madame de Pompadour at the height of her favor is steeped in melancholy. Her lady's maid, Madame du Hausset, the confidant of her perpetual anxieties, said to her with sincere commiseration: "I pity you, Madame, while every one else is envying you," and the Marquise, satiated with false pleasures, tormented with real sufferings, remarked bitterly: "The sorceress said I would have time to acknowledge my faults before I die; I believe it, for I shall perish of nothing but chagrin."

When she dies she is no more regretted by Louis XV. than Mademoiselle de La Vallière and Madame de Montespan had been by Louis XIV. From one of the windows of Versailles, during a frightful storm, the King saw the carriage which was taking the favorite's coffin to Paris. "The Marquise will not have fine weather for her journey," said he. Hardly had she gone down into the grave when the

[1] Massillon, *Panégyrique de Sainte Madeleine.*

poor dead woman was forgotten by all. The Queen herself remarked it when she wrote to President Hénault: "Here there is no more question of her who is no more than if she had never existed. Such is the world; it is not worth the trouble of loving it."

The destinies of the heroines of Versailles are not interesting solely from the moral point of view, as subjects of philosophical study, and sources of Christian reflections. In their historical relations also they have what may be called a symbolical importance. Certain of these women sum up, in fact, a whole society, personify an entire epoch. Madame de Montespan, the superb, luxuriant, ample beauty, good to show to all the ambassadors; Madame de Montespan, the *grande dame*, proud of her birth, her charms, her wit, her riches, her magnificence; the woman whose terrible railleries made her as much feared as she was admired, so much so, in fact, that the courtiers said they dared not pass under her windows for fear of being shot at; the ostentatious, dazzling mistress whom the ancients would have represented as Cybele, carrying Versailles upon her forehead, is she not the very incarnation of haughty and triumphant France at the culminating point of the reign of Louis XIV., that France which resuscitates the pomps of paganism and envelops the radiant sovereign whom it idolizes in clouds of incense? But the pride of the favorite will be punished like that of her royal lover, and for her as for him humiliations will succeed to triumphs.

The rays of the sun have no longer the same splendor. The royal star which is declining has lost the ardor of its fires. A sincere but sometimes rather narrow devotion comes after those superabundant sins which, to use Tertullian's expression, wish to possess all the light and knowledge of heaven. Madame de Maintenon, with her temperate character and style, her respect for order and the proprieties, her piety which has just a hint of ostentation, is the living symbol of the new court in which religion replaces voluptuousness. But at the side of this wisdom of repentant age, this reaction of austerity against pleasure, there is still the contrast of youth. 'Tis the Duchess of Burgundy who represents this protest of gaiety against sadness, of spring against winter, of freedom of manners against the restrictions of etiquette.

After Louis XIV., the Regency. After compression, scandal. The new epoch is troublous, licentious, dissolute. Is not the Duchess of Berry, so fantastic, so capricious, so passionate, its very image? As to the favorites of Louis XV., their sad history marks out for us the stages of humiliation and the moral decadence of absolute power. At first the King takes his mistresses from among the great ladies, then from the middle classes, lastly from the women of the people. He descends from the Duchess de Châteauroux to the Marquise de Pompadour, from the Marquise de Pompadour to Madame Dubarry. There is a gradual diminution

of prestige and dignity. Adultery derogates. Vice throws off all manner of disguise. And yet, even under the reign of Louis XV., patriarchal manners, honest and truly Christian sentiments, characters which do honor to human nature, may here and there be found. Queen Marie Leczinska is like the epitome of these virtuous types. Her domestic hearth is near the boudoir of the favorites, and it is she who preserves for the court the last traditions of decency and decorum.

Last of all comes Marie Antoinette, the woman who, in the most striking and tragic of all destinies, represents not solely the majesty and the griefs of royalty, but all the graces and all the agonies, all the joys and all the sufferings, of her sex.

THE WOMEN OF VERSAILLES

I

THE CHÂTEAU OF VERSAILLES

BEFORE recalling the rôle played by the women of Versailles, something must be said of the stage on which their destinies were fulfilled, and the miraculous transformation by which a dismal and gloomy spot, full of quicksands and marshes, with neither view, water, trees, nor land, was made anew, as one may say, in the image of the great King, and became a marvel admired by all the world. Like those great rivers which at their source are hardly more than rivulets, the existence of the palace destined one day to be so splendid commenced in most modest and simple proportions.

It was in 1624 that Louis XIII. had a hunting-meet erected at Versailles on a rising ground previously occupied by a windmill. In 1627, at an assembly of notables, which met in the Tuileries, Bassompierre reproached the King with not completing the crown buildings, saying with this intent: "It is not His Majesty's inclination to build;

the finances of the Chamber are not exhausted by his sumptuous edifices, unless one would like to reproach him with the wretched château of Versailles, in the construction of which a private gentleman would not take much pride."[1]

In 1651, eight years after his father's death, Louis XIV., then in his thirteenth year, came for the first time to Versailles. From childhood he was attached to this abode, and several years later he selected it as the site of magnificent festivities. In the month of May, 1664, he caused the performance there of the *Plaisirs de l'île enchantée*, diversions borrowed from Ariosto's poem, and towards the execution of which Benserade and President de Périgny contributed the recitations in verse, Molière and his troop the comedy, Lulli the music and the ballets, and the Italian mechanician Vigarani the decorations, illuminations, and fireworks.

May 7, the first day of the fêtes, there was tilting at the ring in presence of the two queens, in a grassy circle formed at the entrance of the great alley now called the green carpet, *tapis vert*. The youthful Louis XIV., wearing a costume sparkling with all the crown diamonds, represented the Paladin Roger in the island of Alcina. After the tourney, in which he was the victor, Flora and Apollo came to congratulate him in chariots drawn by nymphs,

[1] See, on the origins of the palace, the curious and learned work published by M. Le Roi, under the title, *Louis XIII. et Versailles.*

satyrs, and dryads. At the banquet, Time, the Hours, and the Seasons waited on the guests, who were shaded by thickets of lilacs, and coppices of myrtles and roses. The next day, May 8, the *Princesse d'Élide*, a piece in which Molière played the parts of Lyciscas and Moron, was represented on a stage erected in the middle of the same great alley; May 9, a ballet in the palace of Alcides, which simulated its conflagration; May 10, a *course de têtes* in the castle moats; May 11, a representation of Molière's *Fâcheux;* May 12, a lottery in which the prizes were pieces of furniture, silverware, and precious stones, and in the evening, *Tartuffe;* May 13, *Mariage forcé;* May 14, departure of the King and court for Fontainebleau. Mademoiselle de La Vallière had been the heroine of these fêtes, at which Molière extolled the favorite's amours in presence of the Queen herself.

Versailles was not yet the royal residence, but Louis XIV. came there from time to time to spend some days, and occasionally several weeks, especially when he wished to dazzle eyes and fascinate imaginations by the brilliancy of these ostentatious festivities which resembled apotheoses.

September 14, 1665, there was a great hunt at Versailles, when the Queen, Madame Henrietta of England, with Mademoiselle de Montpensier and Mademoiselle d'Alençon, rode in amazonian costumes; in February, 1667, a tournament which overpassed the limits of magnificence.

The *Gazette* takes pains to describe the cortège of court ladies, "all admirably equipped and on selected horses, led by Madame in the most superb vest, and seated on a white horse with trappings of brocade sown with pearls and precious stones." Following the feminine squadron appeared the Sun-King, "not less easily recognized by the lofty mien peculiar to him than by his rich Hungarian habit, covered with gold and precious stones, his helmet with waving plumes, and the spirited horse which seemed prouder of carrying so great a monarch than of its magnificent trappings and its jewelled saddle-cloth."[1] Then followed Monsieur, the King's brother, in Turkish costume; then the Duke d'Enghien, dressed as an Indian; then the other noblemen, who formed ten quadrilles.

July 10, 1668, there were new rejoicings; during the day, a representation of the *Fêtes de l'Amour et de Bacchus*, words by Quinet and music by Lulli, and of *Georges Dandin*, played by Molière and his troop; in the evening a banquet and a ball; at two in the morning illuminations. The circumference of the parterre of Latona, the grand alley, the terrace, and front of the palace were decorated with statues, vases, and chandeliers lighted in an ingenious fashion, which made them appear as if glowing with interior flames. Rockets crossed each other in the air above the château, and when all these lights

[1] *Gazette* of 1667.

were extinguished, says Félibien, in terminating his description of the fête, it was perceived that day, jealous of the advantages of such a night, had begun to dawn.

September 17, 1672, the King's troop represented Molière's *Femmes savantes* at Versailles, who were *admirées d'un chacun*, says the *Gazette*. Bourdaloue preached the Lenten sermons there from February 8 to April 19, 1674; July 11, the *Malade imaginaire* of Molière, who had died the previous year, was played there; in August came a series of grand fêtes. Félibien gives a striking description of the night of August 31, 1674, when, under a dark and starless sky, a most unheard-of rain of lights suddenly became visible. All the parterres glittered. The grand terrace in front of the château was bordered with a double row of lights set two feet apart. The steps and railings of the horseshoe, all the walls, all the fountains, all the reservoirs, shone with myriad flames. This pyrotechnic art, this blending of fire and flowers and water which made the park resemble the garden of Armida, had come from Italy. The borders of the grand canal were adorned with statues and architectural decorations behind which an infinity of lights had been placed to render them transparent. The King, the Queen, and all the court were on richly ornamented gondolas. Boats filled with musicians followed them, and Echo repeated the sounds of an enchanted harmony.

After the next year, great works, begun by Levau

and Dorbay, continued by Jules Hardoin-Mausart, were undertaken at Versailles, where Louis XIV. wished to take up his permanent residence. What motives determined him to abandon the château of Saint-Germain, where he was born, where he had experienced the first sensations of love, that admirably situated château whence one beholds so picturesque a forest, so beautiful a stream, so vast and magnificent a horizon? Nothing is lacking to Saint-Germain, neither woods, waters, nor prospect. Its air is keen and salubrious. It seems made to inspire great thoughts, and from the heights of that unparalleled terrace which leans against the forest, one contemplates one of the most varied and majestic panoramas of the globe.

Had Louis XIV. expended for the enlargement and embellishment of the old château (that which is still existing) and the new château (that which formerly faced the Seine and was destroyed under Louis XVI.) one half the sums expended on Versailles, what an incomparable palace, what a marvel, one might have admired! What could not have been made of the new château of Saint-Germain (of which nothing now remains but the pavilion of Henry IV.), that elegant château whose staircases appear from a distance like arabesques in relief encrusted upon the side of the hill, and whose five successive terraces, adorned with thickets, fountains, and parterres of flowers, come down to the Seine at Pecq? How could he prefer to such a residence

and such a landscape, an obscure manor built on ungrateful soil, surrounded by muddy ponds, without views, without water, on an estate which, instead of being favored by nature, it was necessary to tyrannize over and subdue by force of art and riches?

Was it, as has been said, the distant view of the steeple of Saint-Denis, the final term of royal grandeur, which rendered Saint-Germain so antipathetic to Louis XIV.? Did that steeple which from the horizon seemed to be saying to him: "*Memento homo quia pulvis es et in pulverem reverteris*, Remember, man, that thou art dust, and unto dust thou shalt return," rebuke the pride of life and omnipotence which overflowed in him? Such a thought seems to us pusillanimous. It would be unworthy of the great King. We incline rather to the belief that what Louis XIV. found displeasing in Saint-Germain was the memory of the time when, driven from Paris by the troubles of the Fronde, he had been taken by night to the old château. Doubtless he disliked to have the capital which had insulted his childhood constantly in view from his window.

To tear himself away from an importunate souvenir; to efface completely, even in thought, the last vestiges of rebellious acts against royal authority; to choose a residence which was nothing, in order to make of it the most radiant of palaces; to take pleasure in this transformation as being the triumph of pride, of strength, of will; to create all for him-

self, architecture, gardens, fountains, horizon; to constrain nature to bend beneath the yoke and avow itself vanquished, like the revolution, — such was the dream of Louis XIV., and this dream he realized.

From 1675 to 1682, the works at Versailles were carried on with astonishing rapidity. The grand apartments of the King and the staircase called that of the Ambassadors were completed. The Gallery of Mirrors was constructed at the spot where a terrace occupied the middle of the façade, on the side of the gardens. The south wing, called the Princes' wing, was added to the château. The buildings to right and left of the first court in front of the château, called the Ministers' wings, were finished. The large and small stables were built.

Finally, in 1681, the chapel was transferred to the present site of the Salon of Hercules and the vestibule below it. April 30, 1684, Francis de Harlay, Archbishop of Paris, blessed the chapel, and on the 6th of May following, Louis XIV. definitively installed himself at Versailles.[1]

The King established himself in the very centre of the palace. The salon of the Œil-de-Bœuf[2] was then divided into two rooms: the Bassani chamber,

[1] If one wishes to get an idea of the enlargements of Versailles, he has only to look at Van der Meulen's picture in the King's ante-chamber (room 121 in M. Soulié's *Notice du Musée*). This picture, numbered 2145, represents Versailles as it was before the works undertaken by Louis XIV.

[2] Room 123 of the *Notice du Musée*.

so called because it contained several paintings by that master, where the princes and nobles admitted to the sovereign's levee waited; and the former chamber of Louis XIII., where Louis XIV. slept, from 1682 to 1701. Adjoining this chamber was the grand cabinet where the ceremonies of the levee and the couchée took place, where the King gave audience to the nuncio and the ambassadors, and received the oaths of the chief officials of his household.[1] The next room[2] was at this period divided into two. That nearest to the King's chamber was called the Cabinet of the Council, and in it Louis XIV., with his ministers, took the greatest decisions of his reign; the other was called the *Cabinet des Termes* or *des Perruques*.

The Queen and the Dauphin were lodged, the one on the first story, the other on the ground-floor, in the south part of the old château of Louis XIII., that which has a view of the orangery and the Swiss lake. The Queen's apartments ended through the Peace Salon, at the Gallery of Mirrors, the masterpiece of the new Versailles. At the other extremity of the gallery began, with the War Salon, the rooms designated as the grand apartments of the King, state and reception rooms bearing mythological names: halls of Apollo, Mercury, Diana, and Venus.

[1] Room 124 of the *Notice*. This room became the bedchamber of Louis XIV., and he died there.

[2] *Salle du Conseil*, No. 125 of the *Notice*.

The governor of the palace and the King's confessor lodged in the north wing, that which has since been rebuilt by the architect Gabriel. Beyond the site of the present chapel were placed the legitimated children, the princes of Condé and of Conti, the governor of the Children of France, and a goodly number of great officials and chaplains. The Children of France and the Orleans family resided in the great south hall, opposite the gardens. Finally, the secretaries of State, the ministers of the King's household, of foreign affairs, war, and the navy, were installed in the two projecting buildings in front of which are now placed the statues of celebrated men. These immense constructions, greatly subdivided interiorly, served as a habitation for several thousand persons.

Versailles was finished. With very slight modifications it offered the same spectacle which it presents to-day. Seen from the town side, the monument, though grandiose, is incongruous. Its composite architecture, the noticeable contrast between the brick and the stone, between the primitive château and its immense additions, have a somewhat astounding character. Seen from the park, on the contrary, it is majestic, regular, and supremely harmonious. This façade, say rather these three façades, more than six hundred yards in width and having altogether three hundred and seventy-five openings into the garden; this projecting building where the master dwelt, and which throws out in

the midst of a long right line wings which seem to draw back as if to keep at a respectful distance; these thickets fashioned into walls of verdure; these reservoirs framed in precious marbles, which seem like so many halls in open air, dependent on the palace of which they are the complement, — all this profoundly impresses the eyes and the mind.

And yet it has a great defect. Hardly has one made a few steps, after descending the first staircase, when the château sinks down and disappears, like the sun setting on the coast. Is it not the image of that absolute monarchy which, after shedding so dazzling a glow, was suddenly to be extinguished and disappear from the horizon? Yet in spite of this fault of perspective, the edifice has a sort of radiant serenity, and never, perhaps, was the grandeur of a man better identified with the splendor of a palace. There is an intimate relation between the King and his château. The idol is worthy of the temple, the temple of the idol. There is always something immaterial, something moral, so to speak, in monuments, and they derive their poesy from the thought connected with them. For a cathedral, it is the idea of God. For Versailles, it is the idea of the King. Its mythology, as has been justly remarked, is but a magnificent allegory of which Louis XIV. is the reality. It is he always and everywhere. Fabulous heroes and divinities impart their attributes to him or mingle with his courtiers.

In honor of him, Neptune sheds broadcast the

waters which cross in air in sparkling arches. Apollo, his favorite symbol, presides over this enchanted world as the god of light, the inspirer of the Muses; the sun of the god seems to pale before that of the great King: *Nec pluribus impar.* Nature and art combine to celebrate the glory of the sovereign by a perpetual hosannah. All that generations of kings have amassed of pictures, statues, and precious movables, is distributed as mere furniture in the glittering apartments of the château. One inhales as it were an odor of incense. The intoxicating perfumes of luxury and power throw one into a sort of ecstasy that makes comprehensible the exaltation of this monarch, enthusiastic over himself, who, in chanting the hymns composed in his praise, shed tears of admiration.

II

LOUIS XIV. AND HIS COURT IN 1682

WHEN Louis XIV. definitively established his residence at Versailles, in 1682, the principal women of the court who were installed there with him were the Queen, aged forty-four years, like himself, born in 1638, married in 1660, long-afflicted by her husband's infidelities, and now happy in beholding his return to more virtuous sentiments; the Dauphiness, a Bavarian princess, born in 1660, married in 1680, very feeble in health, gentle and melancholy in disposition; the Duchess of Orleans, sometimes designated as Madame and sometimes as the Princess Palatine, born in 1652, married in 1671 to Monsieur, the King's brother, a German unable to accustom herself to her new country; the Princess de Conti, legitimated daughter of Louis XIV. and Mademoiselle de La Vallière, born in 1666, married in 1681 to Prince Armand de Conti, nephew of the great Condé, a young woman of exceptional grace and beauty; the two other legitimated daughters of the King, Mademoiselle de Nantes, born in 1673, and Mademoiselle de Blois

in 1677, who were to marry, some years later, one the Duke of Bourbon, and the other the Duke of Chartres (the future regent); Madame de Montespan, their mother, then forty-one years old, already at the end of her left-handed reign, but still living at court in the double capacity of lady of the Queen's palace and the mother of legitimated children, but no longer bearing any sway over either the heart or the senses of Louis XIV.; and finally, Madame de Maintenon, already very influential under a modest exterior, still beautiful in spite of her forty-seven years, on equally good terms with both King and Queen, and rewarded, since 1680, for the cares she had bestowed, as governess, on the children of Louis XIV. and Madame de Montespan, by a place expressly created for her which did not bind her to any assiduous service while it gave her an honorable position at court: that of second lady-in-waiting to the Dauphiness.

The parts played by the women of Versailles cannot be understood without studying beforehand the character of the sovereign who was the animating spirit of this palace and who strongly impressed himself not merely on his own realm but on all Europe. Never has any monarch exercised such a prestige over his court; all that shone around him was but the pale reflection of this dazzling luminary. It was from the Sun-King that each woman borrowed lustre, and he must be spoken of before their figures are traced.

Whatever one may say, the life of Louis XIV. gains on close examination. Defects and qualities were alike great in this accomplished type of absolute monarchy, of royalty by right divine. Louis XIV. was not merely majestic, he was amiable. Those who surrounded him, the members of his family, his ministers, his domestics, loved him.

This sovereign, intimidating to such a point that, according to Saint-Simon, it was necessary to begin by accustoming one's self to see him if, in speaking with him, one did not wish to run the risk of coming to a standstill, was nevertheless full of benevolence and affability. "Never was a man so naturally polite, nor with so well-regulated a politeness, nor one who better discriminated age, rank, and merit. . . . Never did it happen to him to say a disobliging thing to any one."[1] The Princess Palatine, usually so caustic and severe, paid homage to his qualities both as man and sovereign. "When the King chose," she says in her correspondence, "he was the most agreeable and amiable of men. He joked in a comical way and pleasantly. . . . Although he loved flattery, he often mocked at it himself. . . . He knew perfectly well how to content people even while refusing their requests; his manners were most affable, and he spoke with such politeness that it touched their hearts. . . . When he acted on his own initiative, he was always good and generous."

[1] Memoirs of the Duke de Saint-Simon.

To him pleasure was merely an accessory. Throughout his entire reign he never ceased to work eight hours every day. He wrote in his Memoirs, intended for his son's instruction, that for a king not to work was ingratitude and audacity towards God, and injustice and tyranny towards men. "These conditions of royalty," he added, "which may sometimes appear to you hard and vexatious in so high a place, you would find sweet and easy were it a question of arriving thither. . . . Nothing will be more fatiguing to you than great idleness should you have the misfortune of falling into it. Disgusted with affairs in the first place, next with pleasures, you will at last be disgusted with idleness itself." Work, that is to say duty, was a source of incessant satisfaction for the great King. "To have one's eyes open over all the earth," he wrote in his Memoirs, "to learn incessantly the news of all the provinces and all the nations, the secrets of all courts, the dispositions and the weak points of all princes and all foreign ministers, to be informed about an infinity of things of which we are supposed to be ignorant, to see all around us what people are endeavoring to their utmost to conceal, to discover the most remote views of our own courtiers, — I know not what other pleasure would not be abandoned for this one, even if solely moved by curiosity."

Louis XIV. was a supreme artist who played his part of king with facility and conviction. He was

also a poet in action whose existence, formed to strike the imagination of his subjects, unrolled itself in an uninterrupted series of grand and marvellous deeds; a sovereign enamoured of glory and the ideal, "who took a delighted admiration in great battles, in acts of heroism and courage, in warlike preparations, in the skilfully combined operations of a siege, in the terrible affrays of battle, and, in the depths of forests, in the noisy tumult of great hunting exploits."[1]

On his deathbed, Louis XIV. accused himself of having been too fond of war. He might also have accused himself of having been too fond of women. Yet he had certain illusions respecting them, and sincerely believed that they had never ruled him. He boasts as much — wrongly as we believe — in the Memoirs he addressed to the Dauphin. "In abandoning our hearts," he wrote, "we must remain absolute masters of our minds; we must make a distinction between the tenderness of a lover and the resolutions of a sovereign, so that the beauty who makes our pleasures shall not be free to speak to us concerning our affairs. . . . You know what I have said to you many times about the influence of favorites; that of a mistress is far more dangerous. . . . As the prince ought always to be a perfect model of virtue, it would be well for him to avoid the frailties common to the rest of mankind, the more so because he is sure that they cannot remain hidden."

[1] Walckenaër, *Mémoires sur Madame de Sévigné*, t. V.

Louis XIV. did not always succeed in putting these beautiful and prudent maxims into practice; but, culpable as they were, his amours at all times preserved a certain poetic quality. In the midst of his splendors, the great King thought the joy of loving and of being loved was the supreme happiness. Far from wishing to say: *Veni, vidi, vici*, he courted his mistresses patiently. He comprehended their scruples, he esteemed their resistance, he honored their repentance. Impassioned for love more than for pleasure, he remained sentimental in his most evanescent attachments. As has been remarked by the Princess Palatine, if women wished to please him, it was absolutely necessary for them if not to love him, at least to pretend to do so. The first really profound impression which was made on him by Madame de Maintenon was caused by an evidence of her sensibility. Seeing that her grief at the death of Mademoiselle de Montespan's oldest child had made her lose flesh: "She knows how to love," said he. "It would be a pleasure to be loved by her."

This sovereign, so often accused of cruel egotism, often showed exquisite delicacy of heart. Madame de La Fayette, so good a judge in matters of sentiment, says as much in her Memoirs: "The King, who is good-hearted, has an extraordinary tenderness, especially for women." He desired to be loved by them as much as to possess them. "For him, no commerce with them could be lasting which did not

include that of mind and soul."[1] With his incontestable beauty of face and figure, his majestic sweetness, his penetrating, sympathetic voice, his chivalrous courtesy, his exquisite politeness toward women of every rank, and the supreme elegance of manners and language which distinguished him among all others as the "King-bee," he would have had, even as a private person, the ability to "create the greatest disorders of love."[2]

He often discovered that all the fascinations of riches, the pomp of thrones, the intoxications of pride and power were not worth a kiss, a smile, and amidst the magnificence of his Asiatic court he frequently told himself, like a poet of our own day: —

"Être admiré n'est rien, l'affaire est d'être aimé."[3]

Is not the perfume of the violet more charming than that of incense, and was not a tender word from La Vallière sweeter to his ear and heart than the overstrained compliments of his most skilful courtiers? But the man whom one would love now would no longer be Louis, it would be the King. By an admirable law of Providence, nothing that is really beautiful can be purchased: neither youth, health, nor gaiety, neither consciousness, beauty, talent nor glory, above all not love. Voluptuous pleasure may be bought, and always costs too much,

[1] Walckenaër, *Mémoires sur Madame de Sévigné*, t. V.

[2] Memoirs of the Duke de Saint-Simon.

[3] To be admired is nothing, the thing is to be loved.

for voluptuousness is a very petty thing. As to love, all the knowledge and all the treasures of love cannot acquire it. Louis XIV. is absolute master. Doubtless, if the fancy seized him, almost any woman would still throw herself at his head. But could he find another La Vallière among all those beauties?

1682 is the beginning of his repentance, the year when the King returns to virtue, when he meditates seriously on the advantages of order and duty even from the merely human point of view. His last sensual passion had been for Mademoiselle de Fontanges, who died the previous year. With her was extinguished the great flame of the King's amours. His affection for Madame de Maintenon will be far more intellectual than voluptuous. In that commerce there will be more room for the mind than for the body, and the lover will disappear almost entirely to give place to the devotee. The tragic destiny of Mademoiselle de Fontanges, the rapid honors, atoned for so quickly and so painfully, the tabouret as duchess, the carriages with six horses, the luxury, jewels, splendors, and then the thunderbolt, the terrible death after an unfortunate lying-in, the suspicion of poison, the remark of the Abbess de Chelles, the favorite's sister, on receiving her icy heart: "This heart belonged to God at first; the world had gained it. God has at last resumed what was His, but it was not yielded to Him without pain"; all this had profoundly impressed the mind of Louis XIV.

Since then the words of great preachers had sounded more forcibly than usual in his ears, and the voice of his conscience spoke more loudly than that of his courtiers.

From the depths of the cloister where she had been enclosed eight years already, the retreat and the silence of another woman inspired him with pious reflections and salutary thoughts. The Duchess de La Vallière, now become Sister Louise of Mercy, had said that if the King came to her convent, she would hide herself so effectually that he could not find her.[1] But Louis XIV., penetrated with admiration for the repentance of the sinner whose fault he had occasioned, no longer desired to trouble the calm of the asylum where she had sought refuge from both herself and him. When she lost her brother in 1676, he had sent her word that if he were a good enough man to see a Carmelite so pious as she, he would go in person to tell her how he regretted the loss she had sustained. Louis XIV. has often been accused of having completely forgotten the woman he had so much loved. It is an unjust reproach, if one may credit M. Walckenaër.[2]

According to this judicious critic, La Vallière was never more present to the King's thoughts than after she had abandoned his court. Never had she appeared so adorable to him as when the sight of her

[1] Memoirs of the Princess Palatine.

[2] Walckenaër, *Mémoires sur Madame de Sévigné*, t. V.

had been forbidden him. He joyfully granted all she asked, not for herself, but for her relatives, and was glad to learn that the Queen and all the court gave the pious Carmelite marks of their interest and veneration. It was thus that at the foot of the altar, Sister Louise of Mercy asked from God the conversion of Louis XIV. and obtained it.

This sovereign, however calumniated by certain historians of our day, was never a vulgar debauchee. When it is remembered that at the age of forty-four, being still in the full vigor of moral and physical strength, he put an end to all scandals and thenceforth lived an irreproachable private life until his death, in spite of the seductions surrounding him on every side, it is impossible not to render homage to such a triumph of religious sentiment.

There was nothing in that consciousness of royal dignity with which he has been wrongfully reproached, as if it were a culpable pride, which was incompatible with reverence for the Divinity. Before all things, Louis XIV. was a very spiritual man. Believing in the altar and the throne, he had faith in God first and then in himself, the anointed of the Lord. Heaven was his ideal, and under heaven, royalty; the royalty, which represented the right of force and the force of right, the majestic, tutelary royalty, which, like the sun, shed the splendor and beneficence of its beams on poor and rich, on small and great. Louis XIV. had a very just opinion of himself. So great as he esteemed himself in

the sight of men, so little did he think himself in the sight of God. Better than any other could he apply to himself Corneille's line: —

"Pour être plus qu'un roi, te crois-tu quelque chose?"[1]

The sovereign who would have defied all other monarchs taken together, kneeled humbly before an obscure priest. The worthy inheritor of Charlemagne asked pardon for his sins from the son of a peasant. It is this mixture of Christian humility with royal pride which gives an aspect so imposing to the character of Louis XIV. The religious sentiments taught him from his cradle by his mother constantly recurred to his mind, even in his most lamentable errors. When he was a child this impassioned mother, kneeling before him, cried with transport: "I would respect him as much as I love him." But this exclamation was not an idle flattery. It might be called an act of faith in the principle of royalty.

The first impressions of the child were but strengthened in the man. There was always in him somewhat of both the sovereign and the pontiff. He reigned with the same solemn gravity with which sincerely convinced priests officiate. Soul of the State, source of all grace, all justice, and all glory, he considered himself the lieutenant of God

[1] Dost think thou art somewhat because thou art more than a king?

upon earth, and it was in that capacity that he had a veneration for himself which the great preachers incessantly confirmed. Bossuet's ideas of government are simply a commentary on that political faith, intimately associated with religious faith, of which it is the corollary. To the great bishop as to the great king, royalty is not a trade, but a priesthood, and a sovereign who should not have the sentiment of monarchical dignity would be as blameworthy as a priest who should not respect the cult of which he is the minister. It was to this theory, the very essence of royal power, that Louis XIV. owed that authoritative physical and moral attitude which Saint-Simon styles "the constant dignity and continual law of his exterior."

The ascendency which he thought it not simply his right but his duty to exercise over all his subjects, be they what they might, made itself especially felt by those who were near him. The government of his court, his family, his gynæceum, was subject to the same rules and doctrines as the affairs of State. In him the paternal and the royal authority were combined. Nothing escaped his control. His wishes were irrevocable decrees, and his son, the Dauphin, behaved toward him like the most submissive and respectful of all his courtiers. Revolutionary times may criticise such a system, but it is admirable none the less. The principle of authority, imposed on Nature herself as the general law of creation, is the basis of all organized society.

It is the glory of Louis XIV. to have been the convinced representative, the living symbol of this principle; to have comprehended that where there is no religious there is no political discipline, and that where there is no political there is no military discipline. The same theories are applicable to churches, palaces, and camps. Indispensable authority is still more precious than necessary liberties, and in matters of government as in those of art, beauty is impossible without unity. The entire programme of Louis XIV. was a constant aspiration toward the unity which is harmony. That is why Napoleon, in excusing the defects of a sovereign whose glory he was so well adapted to appreciate, said with admiration: "Are there not spots on the sun? Louis XIV. was a great king. It was he who raised France to the first rank among nations. What king of France since Charlemagne can be compared to Louis XIV. under all his aspects?"

III

QUEEN MARIE THÉRÈSE

TO find among types disturbed by pride, ambition, and the love of pleasure, a face of supreme sweetness, a truly Christian character, a pure, candid, angelic soul, is a veritable satisfaction, I might almost say a repose to the observer. One looks with composure at simplicity beneath the diadem; humility on the throne; the qualities and virtues of a nun in the heart of a queen; a short but well-filled life; a rôle seemingly eclipsed, but in reality more serious and above all more noble and respectable than that of many celebrated women; at great moral sufferings Christianly and courageously supported; in a word, at an irreproachable type of piety and goodness, of conjugal tenderness and maternal love. Such was Marie Thérèse of Austria, the pious companion of Louis XIV.

The French monarchy has had the privilege of being sanctified by a certain number of queens whose virtues might be called a compensation for court scandals, and who have contributed more than any others to preserve the moral authority of the throne.

Just as under the reigns of the later Valois Claude of France, Elisabeth of Austria, and Louise de Vaudémont redeemed the vices of Francis I., Charles IX., and Henry III. by their purity of heart, so Marie Thérèse may be said to have recompensed morality for the injuries inflicted on it by Louis XIV. History should not forget this woman in whose veins flowed the blood of Charles V. and that of Henry IV.; this sovereign who wore her royal mantle with dignity even while comparing it to a winding-sheet; this model wife who loved her husband with all the strength of her soul and never approached him but with a mingled respect, fear, and tenderness; this devoted mother who made it her care to move the heart of the young Prince whose mind was committed to the charge of Bossuet; this holy woman who has proved that a palace may become a sanctuary, and that a Christian heart may beat under velvet and ermine as well as under a robe of frieze.

Marie Thérèse, born like Louis XIV. in 1638, was but a few days younger than he. Her father was Philip IV., King of Spain, and her mother Isabella of France, daughter of Henry IV. and Maria de' Medici. Hence she was cousin-german to Louis XIV. The Christian sentiments of this princess who reckoned Saint Elisabeth of Hungary and Saint Elisabeth of Portugal among her ancestors, did not prevent her from being conscious of the glory of her family. A nun who was aiding her to make her examination of conscience for a general confession,

asked her one day, if before her marriage, she had never sought to please or desired to be loved. "No," replied the Queen. "Could I have loved any one in Spain? There were no kings at my father's court."

Marie Thérèse was not remarkable from the physical point of view. Her Germanic rather than Spanish countenance, her dull white complexion, her very blond hair, her large pale blue eyes, her red and hanging lips, her heavy features, her small figure, rendered her neither beautiful nor ugly. Still, at the time of her marriage she had not lacked overstrained compliments and enthusiastic descriptions. All Parnassus had set to work. A multitude of French and Latin verses, in the following strain, had been composed: —

> "Thérèse seule a pu vaincre par ses regards
> Ce superbe vainqueur, qui triomphe de Mars."[1]

> "*Victorem Martis præda, spolii isque superbum*
> *Vincere quæ posset, sola Theresa fuit.*"

But this Queen whose hand had been desired by so many princes, and whose marriage had so much politieal importance, made a silence all round her as soon as she was installed in the Louvre and at Saint-Germain. The timidity of her character, her instinctive horror of the slanders and calumnies so

[1] Theresa only has been able to vanquish by her glances
This superb victor who triumphs over Mars.

frequent in courts, her remoteness from all intrigues, her passionate admiration for the King whom she believed far too superior to herself for her to dare offer him any political counsel, all aided to keep her ignorant of government secrets. Nevertheless, when Louis XIV. made foreign wars, he decorated her with the title of regent. But in spite of these more nominal than real functions, Marie Thérèse busied herself very little with the affairs of State, and the ministers continued in fact, if not in law, to hold only from the sovereign. On formal occasions Louis XIV. addressed his bulletins of victory to the Queen. It was she who received official notification of the crossing of the Rhine. When her husband was making a campaign, people said: "The King is fighting, and the Queen praying."

Marie Thérèse had not a superior intelligence, but she united a great sentiment of dignity to much tact and good sense. To Bossuet, who was charged with the education of the Dauphin, she said: "Do not permit anything, sir, in the conduct of my son which may wound the sanctity of the religion he professes and the majesty of the throne to which he is destined." Her convictions as to the origin and character of the royal power were absolutely like those of her husband. She testified a boundless admiration for him, and not one of the women who were enamoured of him loved him more strongly and more constantly. At the beginning of her marriage, Louis XIV. had treated her not only with great

respect, but with real tenderness. When she brought the Dauphin into the world, the King was shedding tears of anguish so long as the pains of her delivery lasted, and at five o'clock in the morning he went to confession and communion.[1] In eleven years Marie Thérèse had three sons and three daughters and lost them all very young with the exception of the Dauphin. She endured these cruel deaths with admirable resignation but with a lacerated heart.

Her husband's infidelities, concealed at first, public later on, caused her nothing less than torture. Assuredly it was a sad spectacle to see the King's favorites forming part of the Queen's household and apparently waiting on a woman of whom, under the externals of respect, they were in reality the rivals and persecutors. Mademoiselle de La Vallière, maid of honor to Marie Thérèse, made her suffer all the torments of jealousy and outraged conjugal love. More than once the unhappy Queen was heard to exclaim with bitterness: "That girl will be the death of me." Mademoiselle de La Vallière rode in the royal carriage with Madame de Montespan and appeared thus at the frontiers, the camps, and the armies.

"The people," says Saint-Simon, "hastened from all parts to see the three queens, and asked each other in all simplicity if they had seen them." Thirty-six years of the most austere penitence in

[1] Memoirs of Madame de Motteville.

the strictest conventual enclosure and the most severe mortifications did not seem to the Duchess de La Vallière, now become Sister Louise of Mercy, a sufficient expiation for the griefs she had occasioned the saintly Queen. Between the repentant favorite and the forgiving wife there were established, in the holy silence of the cloister, friendly relations which form one of the most touching souvenirs of history. A member of the Paris clergy, M. l'Abbé Duclos, has devoted a long and learned work to the comparative study of Marie Thérèse and Mademoiselle de La Vallière. It is in reality an edifying subject, and I do not wonder that it thrust itself upon the pious meditations of a priest. Nowhere was Marie Thérèse more loved and venerated than in that Carmelite convent in the rue Saint-Jacques where she came to visit the woman who had exchanged the rôle of a king's mistress for that of a servant of God.

Some time before her own scandalous favor began, Madame de Montespan had said: "God preserve me from being the King's mistress! But if I were so, I should be very much ashamed before the Queen." The woman who used this language was precisely she who was to play her part as favorite with the utmost pomp and pride. And yet, at the bottom of her soul the triumphant beauty, the superb sultana, so infatuated with her charms and her wit, her luxury and splendor, her elevation and her power, felt herself belittled in presence of this good and

pious Queen, the mere sight of whom was a mute reproach. For awhile she succeeded in deceiving her and in passing for an exemplary woman. But the Queen, who, though she did not readily believe in evil, was not without perspicacity, was quickly disabused. One day she said: "I know more about it than they think, and I am nobody's dupe, whatever they may fancy."

Louis XIV., who felt himself guilty toward this Queen so worthy of affection and respect, tried to make amends by the deference he displayed for her. He treated her with gentleness and courtesy both in public and private, and through attachment and conscience as an honest man as well as through interest in his dynasty, he never entirely neglected her. When he came back to her, says the Princess Palatine, "she became so gay that people remarked it every time. . . . Then she laughed, and twinkled, and rubbed her little hands. . . . She had such an affection for the King that she tried to read in his eyes whatever would give him pleasure; providing he looked kindly at her she was happy all day."[1] She neither acted, thought, nor lived except in him. The fear of displeasing him turned her cold with fright. "That poor princess," says Madame de Caylus in her *Souvenirs*, "had such a dread of the King and such great natural timidity that she neither dared speak to him nor run the risk of a tête-à-tête

[1] Letters of the Princess Palatine.

with him. I have heard Madame de Maintenon say that the King having sent for the Queen one day, she asked her to go with her, so that she might not appear alone in his presence; but that she only conducted her to the door of the room and there took the liberty of pushing her so as to make her enter, and that she observed such a great trembling in her whole person that her very hands shook with fright."

How, with a wife so worthy of respect, so irreproachable as Marie Thérèse, could a sovereign who, like Louis XIV., had the notion of justice and injustice, of respect for himself and his people, have so far forgotten himself as to recognize, publicly and solemnly, the children of a double adultery? This is a real problem. The fault, we are bound to say, was less due to the King's pride than to the idolatry of the nation. The chief offenders were those servile courtiers who through interest and cupidity far more than through admiration deified the monarch in open Christendom, and, if they had received permission, would have raised altars as well as triumphal arches to him. Never would Louis XIV. have permitted these legitimations if public opinion had been more moral. One is obliged to recognize that in this affair neither the clergy, the nobility, nor the people at large possessed the necessary energy and dignity. Great scandals are accomplished only by degrees. Sovereigns do not yield to them unless they are supported by the base sentiments of those around them. Louis XIV. had at first no thought

of legitimating his bastards, still less of putting them in the line of succession to the crown. He was led to it by a combination of different circumstances: in the first place, I confess, by that pride which made him rate himself, like another Jove, above the laws of his Olympus; then by the impulse, the vertigo of those audacious sins, those *péchés d'abondance* which, as Bossuet says, "wish to enjoy all the light of day and all the knowledge of heaven." He had paternal affection also, and greater, perhaps, than all these, a desire to rehabilitate and console the women of whose faults he had been the cause.

But in spite of everything, the legitimations are monstrous actions, unjustifiable attacks upon morality, society, and religion, and on this head Saint-Simon's wrath is only too just. But does not the responsibility fall, in part at least, on those detestable flatterers of whom Racine speaks who are the panders and slaves of royal vices? Does not one recall these curious remarks of the austere Duke de Saint-Simon concerning his own father: "Louis XIII. was really enamoured of Mademoiselle de Hautefort. . . . My father was young and gallant, and he could not understand a king so amorous and so little able to conceal it, who did not go any farther. He thought it was timidity, and on this principle, when the King was once speaking to him passionately about this girl, my father proposed to him to become his ambassador and bring the affair to a speedy conclusion."

Could we believe it? The man who urged Louis XIV. most strongly to make scandalously fine alliances for his bastards was the great Condé. The marriage of his nephew, Prince de Conti, to a daughter of Mademoiselle de La Vallière, and that of his grandson to a daughter of Madame de Montespan, overwhelmed him with joy.

"The King," says Madame de Caylus, "would never have thought of raising his bastards so high but for the anxiety shown by the two Princes of Condé to link themselves with him by this sort of marriages. Condé hoped to efface in this way the impression the past might have left on the King's mind; his son displayed the zeal and baseness of a courtier who wanted to make his fortune." It must be admitted that the attitude of such a man as the victor of Rocroy is, not indeed an excuse, but an attenuating circumstance for Louis XIV. When flatterers arrive at a certain limit one cannot demand wisdom of kings. How can a prince believe himself still a man when idolatrous subjects treat him as a demigod? We find but one thing surprising, and that is that, in spite of his flatterers, Louis XIV. still retained so much good sense as to desire and will his own conversion.

"It is very true," says the Princess Palatine, "that our King has given scandal by his mistresses, but he has had a great repentance for it." He had never yielded to voluptuousness without remorse, and even at the time of his most violent passions, a

secret struggle, a relentless battle between pleasure and duty went on within him. In the very height of his most stormy temptations he had returns to virtue. Religious faith never abandoned him. He never but once failed to be present at Mass, and that in war-time when to do otherwise was impossible.

From the 1st of January, 1674, he had brought about a considerable modification in the Queen's household. Suppressing the maids of honor, several of whom had doubtful reputations, he had set about replacing them by women married to great personages and specially renowned for conjugal fidelity. He was freeing himself by degrees from the tyranny of his senses, and his passion for Madame de Montespan was on the decline when, in 1680, a new idol, Mademoiselle de Fontanges, suddenly kindled a new flame. He took to dancing again with the ardor of a very young man. Like Mademoiselle de La Vallière, the favorite received the title of duchess. Her sister was appointed Abbess of Chelles, just as Madame de Montespan's sister had been appointed Abbess of Fontevrault.

In 1680, on New Year's Day, she was present at the King's Mass "extraordinarily decked with jewels on a robe of the same stuff as Her Majesty's, and both of them with blue ribbons."[1] La Fontaine addressed her the most laudatory of epistles. She seemed at the height of favor when, carried off by a

[1] Bussy Rabutin's Letters to La Rivière, January 15, 1680.

MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE.

sudden death, after a pregnancy, June 28, 1681, she once more proved that, as Bossuet has said, health is but a name, life but a dream, and the graces and pleasures only a dangerous amusement.

In this terrible death Louis XIV. beheld a lesson, a warning from on high, and thenceforth he returned in good earnest to the principles of virtue and duty. Madame de Maintenon, who boasted of loving him not for himself, but for God, used all her influence to keep him faithful to the Queen. When he finally established his residence at Versailles, in 1682, that princess was satisfied with the affection he evinced for her. Madame de Caylus affirms in her *Souvenirs* that he lavished attentions on her to which she was unaccustomed. He saw her more frequently and tried to amuse and divert her. Her son the Dauphin, and her daughter-in-law, the Bavarian Dauphiness, also showed her the greatest deference.

Her apartments at Versailles, composed of five large rooms, ending at the marble staircase at one extremity and at the Gallery of Mirrors at the other, were furnished magnificently. The Queen occupied the chamber already mentioned in the introduction to this study, and from which may be seen the Orangery, the Swiss lake, and the hills of Satory. She was fond of leaving this splendid abode in order to go and pray in convents or visit hospitals. She might be seen waiting on the sick with her own royal hands, carrying them their nourishment like a simple infirmarian, and when the doctors remarked

on this in the interests of her own health, she replied that she could not employ it better than in serving Jesus Christ in the persons of the poor.

Notwithstanding the return of affection manifested for her by the King, she continued to live humbly and modestly, busying herself with her domestic affairs, and not with those of State. The *Gazette officielle* never mentions this good Queen except to announce that she had fulfilled her religious duties in her parish church or had gone to spend the day with the Carmelites of the rue Bouloi.

Marie Thérèse, happy and consoled, rejoiced in the kindness of the King and the birth of her grandson, the Duke of Burgundy. Far from being jealous of the increasing influence of Madame de Maintenon, she congratulated herself on it as one cause of the pious sentiments of Louis XIV., and never could it have occurred to her mind that Scarron's widow, the former governess of the bastards, would soon be the King's wife, and Queen of France in all but name.

IV

MADAME DE MONTESPAN IN 1682

LOUIS XIV. had repented sincerely. After the death of Mademoiselle de Fontanges he had definitely forsaken mistresses, and was giving edification instead of scandal. Madame de Montespan, who was treated with consideration on account of her birth and rank, and as being the mother of legitimated children, still acted as superintendent of the Queen's household. But Louis XIV. never saw her except in public, and she no longer counted for anything as favorite or mistress. In spite of her desperate efforts to retain her empire she was forced to let the left-hand sceptre slip from her grasp, and after making a hard battle against fate, after having employed her last batteries, she was obliged to own herself irremediably defeated. In 1682 she had given up the struggle, and religion was offering her a balm for the wounds inflicted by spite and pride.

She was then forty years old and still preserved the lustre of her beauty. She did not owe her defeat to the diminution of her charms, but rather

to the progress of religious sentiments in the soul of Louis XIV.

Before examining what the haughty favorite became, let us see what she had been in the days of her shameful victories.

A haughty and opulent beauty, a forest of fair hair, flashing blue eyes, a complexion of splendid carnation and dazzling whiteness, one of those alluring and radiant countenances which shed brightness around them wherever they appear, an incisive, caustic wit, sparkling with life and animation, an inextinguishable thirst for riches and pleasure, luxury and domination, the manners of a goddess audaciously usurping the place of Juno on Olympus, passion without love, pride without dignity, splendor without poetry: that was Madame de Montespan.

Born in 1641, at the château of Tonnay-Charente, of the Duke de Mortemart and Diana de Grandseigne, she was maid of honor to the Queen in 1660 and in 1663 was married to the Marquis de Montespan. She had been brought up very religiously and went to communion every week. Nothing, at this period, could have made her foresee the sorry rôle to which ambition and vanity, far more than an impulse of the heart, were to condemn her youth. Moreover, we must do her the justice of admitting that she did not succumb without a struggle. It is said that she entreated her imprudent husband to take her away from the perils of the court while there was still

time. It cost M. de Montespan something not to have been more jealous. Madame de Caylus remarks concerning this that far from having been born depraved, the future favorite had a character naturally disinclined to gallantry and tending towards virtue. "She was flattered at being mistress, not solely for her own pleasure, but on account of the passion of the King. She believed she could make him always desire what she had resolved never to grant him. She was in despair at her first pregnancy, consoled herself for the second one, and in all the others carried impudence as far as it could go."[1]

Her great favor lasted about thirteen years. This was the epoch of the intoxication of courtiers and the prostration of peoples. The court was like a sort of Christian and monarchical Olympus of which King Louis XIV. was the Jove. "Inferior gods and goddesses moved beneath him. Their virtues were extolled and their very vices paraded with an audacity of superiority which seemed to establish between the people and the throne the difference between the morality of gods and that of men. Louis XIV. had made himself accepted as an exception in all things, even in humanity."[2] The most admirable geniuses had become the accomplices of this new idolatry. Did not Molière say in his *Amphitryon*: —

[1] *Souvenirs* of Madame de Caylus.
[2] Lamartine, *Étude sur Fénelon.*

"Un partage avec Jupiter
N'a rien du tout qui déshonore,
Et sans doute il ne peut être que glorieux
De se voir le rival du souverain des Dieux."[1]

M. de Montespan was not of this opinion, but he was considered a ridiculous person, a fool.

The good La Fontaine, offering to Madame de Montespan the seventh book of his fables, fairly outstripped the limits of flattery in his dedication: —

"Sous vos seuls auspices ces vers
Seront juges, malgré l'envie,
Dignes des yeux de l'univers.
Je ne merite pas une faveur si grande;
La Fable en son nom la demande;
Vous savez quel crédit ce mensonge a sur nous.
S'il procure à mes vers le bonheur de vous plaire,
Je croirai lui devoir un temple pour salaire:
Mais je ne veux bâtir des temples que pour vous."[2]

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[1] A partnership with Jupiter
Has nothing at all dishonoring in it,
And doubtless it cannot be other than glorious
To behold oneself the rival of the sovereign of the gods.

[2] Under your auspices alone these verses
Will be judged, in spite of envy,
As worthy of the eyes of the universe.
I do not merit so great a favor;
Fable demands it on her own behalf;
You know what credit fiction has with us.
If it shall procure for my verses the happiness of pleasing you,
I should feel that I owed it a temple as reward;
But I will build no temples save for you.

Adulation was carried so far that the courtiers were grateful to the favorite for having given seven children [1] to the King, and made no adverse criticism on their legitimation. The post of King's mistress was considered as a public function, a great court office, having its rights and duties, its ceremonial and etiquette. Even Colbert, the inflexible minister, the marble man, *vir marmoreus*, the glacial personage whom Madame de Sévigné styled *the North*, was constantly occupied with the love affairs of Louis XIV. and Madame de Montespan. It was to him that the King wrote, June 15, 1678: "I hear that Montespan allows himself to say indiscreet things; he is a fool whom you will do me the kindness to have closely watched. . . . I know he threatens to see his wife, and as he is capable of it, and the consequences might be dreaded, I rely on you to keep him quiet."

[1] Here is the list of the seven children of Louis XIV. and Madame de Montespan: —

1. A daughter, born in 1669, who died at the age of three years;
2. The Duke du Maine, born in 1670, married in 1692 to Mademoiselle de Bourbon-Charolais, died in 1736;
3. The Count de Vexin, born in 1672, died in 1683;
4. Mademoiselle de Nantes, born in 1673, married to the Duke de Bourbon in 1685, died in 1743;
5. Mademoiselle de Tours, born in 1674, died in 1681;
6. Mademoiselle de Blois, born in 1677, married in 1692 to the Duke de Chartres (the future regent), died in 1749;
7. The Count de Toulouse, born in 1678, married in 1728 to Mademoiselle de Noailles, died in 1737.

To all appearance Madame de Montespan was happy. Her beautiful face shone with the glow of her apotheosis. She was the haughty sultana, the idol, the conquering beauty. Madame de Sévigné, the great admirer of success, cast ecstatic glances toward the triumphant mistress. She had a naïve enthusiasm for that marvellous robe "of gold on gold, re-embroidered in gold, and above that a shaggy gold, restitched with a gold mixed with a certain gold, which makes the divinest stuff that ever was imagined." She wrote to her daughter: "Madame de Montespan was covered with diamonds the other day; no one could stand the lustre of such a divinity. . . . O my daughter, what triumph at Versailles! what redoubled pride! what a solid establishment! what pleasure, even by distractions and absence!"

And yet Madame de Montespan was troubled and uneasy. The scandal of her life was disturbed by occasional inclinations toward repentance. Already there was going on in her soul a latent, relentless war between heaven and earth, between duty and sensual pleasure. "The King," says Madame de Caylus, "was religious at bottom, and showed it even in his greatest disorders with women, for that was the only weakness he ever had. The great feasts caused him remorse, for he was equally troubled at not performing his devotions and at performing them badly. Madame de Montespan had the same sentiments, and it was not solely to show her conformity to the King that she displayed

them. She had been perfectly well brought up. She showed it, as the King did at all times, and I remember to have heard that she fasted so rigidly in Lent as to have her bread weighed."

Saint-Simon makes the same remark. He says that "great glutton and gourmand as she was, nothing in the world could have made her fail to observe the regulations of the Church concerning the fasts of Lent and the Ember Days, and she left the King to go and recite some prayers every day."

One day the Duchess d'Uzès expressed her astonishment at such religious scruples. "What! Madame," replied the favorite, "because I do one bad thing must I do all the others?"

Nothing is more painful for the soul than these half-pieties, these half-conversions, these bursts of repentance which bring the fear of hell and take away the hope of paradise. "Virtue," Massillon has said, "is a hidden manna; to taste all its sweetness you must fathom it thoroughly; but the more you advance, the more do consolations abound, the calmer grow the passions, the straighter are the paths, the more you applaud yourself on having broken the chains which you did not drag without regret and secret sadness. Thus, so long as you confine yourself to mere attempts at virtue, you will taste nothing but its repugnances and bitterness; and as you have not the fidelity of the just, you ought not to expect their consolations."[1]

[1] Massillon, *Sermon sur le salut.*

Such was the state of Madame de Montespan's heart when in Holy Week of 1675 she wanted to perform her Easter duties publicly at Versailles. The priest to whom she addressed herself, the Abbé Lécuyer, flatly refused to give her absolution so long as the scandal of adultery continued. Thereupon the wrath of the irascible Duchess was kindled and she carried her complaint to Louis XIV.

The King summoned the curé of the parish to which the Abbé Lécuyer was attached. The curé had the courage to sustain his vicar. Then Bossuet was consulted. The worthy successor of the bishops of the primitive Church did not hesitate a single moment. He replied that in such circumstances an entire, absolute separation was an absolute condition for being admitted to the sacraments, and he proclaimed "the imperious duty of denying absolution to public sinners living in notorious habits of disorder and refusing to quit them." Louis XIV. bowed respectfully to the decision of the man of God. He finally resolved to break with Madame de Montespan.

This most unexpected result — for Louis XIV. was then in the full vigor of manhood and as ardent as ever in his passion for his mistress — was due to the counsels of Bossuet and the preaching of Bourdaloue.

The preachers had a real influence at court, and exercised over both the sovereign and society at large a moral ascendancy which has been described

with as much skill as exactness by a distinguished ecclesiastic, M. the Abbé Hurel.[1] Bourdaloue, the admirable orator, so grand in his simplicity, so venerable in his modesty, the puissant, irresistible dialectician whose compact arguments made him excel in giving pitched battles to the consciences of his hearers, and of whom the great Condé said, as he saw him ascending the pulpit: "Silence! there is the enemy!" Bourdaloue was without contradiction one of the most active agents in the conversion of Louis XIV. He had preached at court the Advent of 1670 and the Lents of 1672, 1674, and 1675.

Bold as a tribune and courageous as an apostle, he turned the iron in the wound. The pitiless enemy of adultery, he exclaimed with holy candor: "Have you not seen again that person, the reef on which your firmness and your constancy have been shattered? Have you not again sought the occasions so dangerous for you? . . . Ah! Christians, how many conversions would not your single example produce? What an attraction would it not be for certain sinners, discouraged and fallen into despair, if they could say to themselves: 'There is that man whom we have seen in the same debaucheries as ourselves, and behold him converted and submissive to God.'" Then, addressing himself more directly still to Louis XIV., the orator added

[1] *Les Orateurs sacrés à la cour de Louis XIV. par M. l'Abbé Hurel.* We recommend this curious and learned work to all who are interested in studying the great century.

in the same sermon: "Truth is what saves kings; Your Majesty seeks for it, loves those who make it known to him, can have nothing but contempt for those who disguise it from him, and, far from resisting it, will esteem it glorious to be vanquished by it."

Bossuet's exhortations were not less urgent. His functions as preceptor to the Dauphin gave him frequent access to the King, and he used them to plead energetically the cause of duty and virtue. It was he who, in his sermon on the feast of the Purification, delivered at court, had said: "Let us fly dangerous occasions and not presume upon our strength. One cannot long resist his vigor when he has to employ it against himself." It was he who wrote to M. de Bellefond: "Pray to God for me; pray Him either to deliver me from the greatest burden that can be imposed on a man, or else to put to death all that is man in me, so that He may act alone. God be thanked, during the whole course of this affair I have not yet thought that I am in the world; but that is not all; one should be, like Saint Ambrose, a real man of God, a man of the other life, in whom all things speak, whose every word is an oracle of the Holy Spirit, whose whole conduct is heavenly; pray, pray, I entreat you."

Louis XIV., reconciled with God and with himself, had received his Easter Communion on Holy Saturday (April, 1675). A few days later, on quitting Versailles to rejoin his army, he declared

to the Queen, to Bossuet, and to Père La Chaise, that all was finally at an end between him and Madame de Montespan. The favorite had submitted. She also had communicated and had taken shelter at Paris in a modest and unknown house. Bossuet went thither to give her instructions and confirm her in the right path. "I find Madame de Montespan sufficiently tranquil," he wrote to Louis XIV. "She occupies herself greatly in good works. I see her much affected by the verities I propose to her, and which are the same I uttered to Your Majesty. To her as to you I have offered the words by which God commands us to yield our whole hearts to Him; they have caused her to shed many tears. May God establish these verities in the depths of both your hearts, in order that so many tears, so much violence, so many efforts as you have made to subdue yourselves may not be in vain!"

The attitude of Bossuet throughout this affair has been criticised with culpable levity. Madame de Sévigné, who does not always weigh her expressions and too frequently judges men and things with the giddiness of a worldly woman, has spoken of a conformity between the counsels of the bishop and those of Madame de Montespan's adherents, of a strong accord between the interests of the policy of the King's mistress and those of Christianity.[1] Chateaubriand has been still more unjust in his *Analyse*

[1] Letter to Madame de Grignan, July 13, 1675.

raisonnée de l'Histoire de France. "We ask ourselves," he says, "how a prince could have a recognized mistress whom honor, genius, and virtue came to worship; this idea made its entrance in the seventeenth century. Bossuet undertook to reconcile Louis XIV. and Madame de Montespan."

Nothing can be more inexact than this assertion, to which M. Floquet and M. Pierre Clément have already done justice.

No; Bossuet was not one "of these teachers who, in their unfortunate and inhuman complaisance, their deadly pity, lay cushions under the elbows of sinners and seek a cloak for their passions."[1] Was the man a pander who wrote to Louis XIV. in July, 1675: "Sire, the feast of Pentecost is approaching, when Your Majesty has resolved to communicate. Although I doubt not that you have thought seriously of what you have promised to God, as you have requested me to remind you of it, the time has come when I feel myself still more bound to do so. Reflect, Sire, that you cannot be truly converted if you do not labor to remove from your heart not merely the sin but the occasion which leads you to it. True conversion does not content itself with destroying the fruits of death, as says the Scripture, that is to say, the sins, but it goes even to the root, which will infallibly cause them to sprout forth again if it be not eradicated."

[1] Bossuet, *Oraison funèbre de Canet.*

With what respectful firmness, what nobility of thought and language, the great bishop addresses himself to the great King! "I hope," he writes in the same letter, "that the great matters which daily occupy Your Majesty more and more, will greatly aid in curing you. Nothing is talked of now but the beauty of your troops and what they are capable of executing under so great a leader. For my part, Sire, I am all the while secretly thinking of a far more important war and a much more difficult victory which God proposes to you.

"Meditate, Sire, on these words of the Son of God; they seem to have been uttered for great kings and conquerors: What doth it profit a man, He says, to gain the whole world and lose his own soul? And what gain can recompense him for so great a loss? Of what use will it be to you, Sire, to be redoubtable and victorious externally, if within you are vanquished and a captive? Pray God then that He may set you free; I will so pray to Him with all my heart. My anxieties for your salvation increase from day to day, because I daily understand better what your dangers are. May God bless Your Majesty! May God grant you victory, and, by victory, peace within and without! The more sincerely Your Majesty gives your heart to God, the more you place your hope and confidence in Him, the more also will you be protected by His powerful hand."

This letter produced an impression on the soul of

Louis XIV. He communicated on Whitsunday, June 2, in the camp of Latines, two days before Mademoiselle de La Vallière was professed as a Carmelite nun. Madame de Montespan also approached the Holy Table. It was believed that a serious conversion had been effected. The Marquise had returned to her château of Clagny, near Versailles. The Queen, always good and generous, forgave her from the bottom of her heart and allowed her to perform her functions as lady of the palace.

Well-informed people were not greatly touched by the pious dispositions of the haughty Marquise who, far from appearing ashamed of the scandals she had given, lorded it over the magnificent constructions of her Clagny palace like Dido in the midst of rising Carthage. "You cannot imagine," wrote Madame de Sévigné, June 12, 1675, "what triumph she is in amongst her workmen, who number some twelve hundred; the palace of Appolidon and the gardens of Armida are a light description of it." While the poor Queen, deceived once more, visited Clagny and took Madame de Montespan sometimes to the Trianon and sometimes to the Carmelite convent, a secret correspondence had been renewed between the King and his mistress. Louis XIV., still at the camp of Latines, wrote to Colbert on June 5: "Continue to do what Madame de Montespan wishes. Send me word what orange-trees have been taken to Clagny." And on the 8th of the same month: "The expense is excessive, and I see from

this that nothing is impossible to you when it is a question of pleasing me. Madame de Montespan sends me word that you have acquitted yourself very well in what I commanded, and that you are always asking if she wants anything; continue always to do so." The flame, far from being extinct, was about to burn more ardently than ever.

Intoxicated with his new triumphs and forgetful of the sacred promises made at the hour of departure, Louis XIV., leaving his army of Flanders, returned to court after an absence of several months (July, 1675). Bossuet, who in spite of all his efforts had not been able to prevent Madame de Montespan's return, went to meet the sovereign at Luzarches. The mere sight of the austere prelate was a mute reproach to the King. As soon as he perceived Bossuet, whose face wore an expression of great sadness, he exclaimed quickly: "Say nothing to me, sir, say nothing to me; I have given my orders and they will be executed."

The whole court was anxious to see what would happen. It was agreed, says Madame de Caylus, that the King should come to Madame de Montespan's house, but, in order to give the scandal-mongers no occasion for faultfinding, it was also agreed that the gravest and most respectable ladies of the court should be present at this interview.

"The King came therefore to Madame de Montespan's house, as had been decided; but he gradually drew her into a window seat, where they whispered

for a long time, wept, and said what is usually said in such cases; afterwards they made a profound reverence to these venerable matrons and passed into another chamber, and from thence came Madame the Duchess of Orleans and afterward M. the Count of Toulouse."

Madame de Caylus adds in her *Souvenirs*, always written with subtlety and malice: "Here I cannot refuse to express a thought which occurs to my mind. It appears to me that the traces of this combat of love and jubilee may still be seen in the character, the physiognomy, and the whole person of Madame the Duchess of Orleans."

To judge from appearances, the favorite had regained all her empire. "Her beauty is extreme," wrote Madame de Sévigné. "Her attire is like her beauty, and her beauty like her attire. . . .[1] I have been told that the other day Quanto[2] was seen leaning her head familiarly on her friend's shoulder; it was thought this affectation was meant to convey: 'I am better off than ever.'"

Some days later Madame de Sévigné declared that the favorite's star was on the decline. "Quanto's star is growing pale; there are tears, natural chagrin, affected gaiety, sulkiness. People look, they observe, they think they see rays of light on countenances which, a month ago, they found unworthy

[1] Letter of August 7, 1676.

[2] Quanto and Quantora are the sobriquets given by Madame de Sévigné to Madame de Montespan.

to be compared with others."[1] "Everybody thinks that the friend is no longer in love. . . . On the other hand, the attitude of friendship is not definitely taken; so much beauty still and so much pride do not easily take a second place. Jealousies are very keen; but did jealousies ever prevent anything?"[2] The witty Marquise concludes by this very just reflection: "If Quanto had really tied her bonnet-strings at Easter the year she returned to Paris, she would not be in her present agitation; she was well-inclined to take this step; but human weakness is great, people like to husband the remains of beauty, and this economy ruins more than it enriches."[3]

Discontent with oneself; the lassitude of illicit loves; the disquiet of a troubled soul which is still seeking happiness in vice but commences to see that it can only be found in virtue; the remorse which will not be stifled; the secret sadness that gnaws the soul, — Louis XIV., hesitating between good and evil, had arrived at these premonitory symptoms of repentance of which Saint Augustine's *Confessions* give so striking a description. Meanwhile, unfaithful to both his wife and his mistress, he was still paying court to the Princess de Soubise, Mademoiselle de Fontanges, and other idols, worshipped on one day only to be abandoned on the next. Madame de Sévigné wrote, April 6, 1680: "Madame de Montespan is enraged. She wept a good deal

[1] Letter of September 11, 1676. [2] Letter of September 30.
[3] Letter of October 16.

yesterday. You can judge of the martyrdom her pride suffers, and it is still more outraged by the high favor of Madame de Maintenon." And Bussy Rabutin, April 30 of the same year: "Madame de Montespan is fallen. The King no longer looks at her, and you may be sure the courtiers follow his example."

Louis XIV. thought to console her for the triumph of Mademoiselle de Fontanges by appointing her superintendent of the household to the Queen, who, "wishing to gratify her and treat her honorably," granted her a pension under this title (April, 1679). But the repudiated favorite, the mistress once "thundering and triumphant," was nevertheless in despair. Her enemies, blinded by hatred, accused her, in defiance of all truth, of having poisoned her rival, the Duchess of Fontanges, and the correspondence of the Princess Palatine shows the following traces of this odious and unjust suspicion: "Madame de Montespan was an incarnate fiend, but the Fontanges was good and simple. The latter is dead, they say, because the former put poison in her milk. I do not know whether this is true, but what I do know well is that two of the Fontanges people died, saying publicly that they had been poisoned."

Louis XIV., thenceforth satisfied as to the bitterness, the satiety, and the anguish of guilty passions, at last returned to God. The work of Bossuet had been accomplished. Saint-Simon, who does full justice to the conduct of the saintly prelate, says

concerning him: "He often spoke to the sovereign with a freedom worthy of the first centuries and first bishops of the Church; he interrupted the course of the disorder many times; at last he made it end."

The conversion of Louis XIV. had this time a definitive character; but this result must not be attributed solely to religion; it was also due to the influence of the woman of whom we are about to speak: Madame de Maintenon.

V

MADAME DE MAINTENON IN 1682

"WHY are we so tender hearted for Mademoiselle de La Vallière? I greatly fear it is on account of her sin, not on account of her repentance. Why are we so hard towards Madame de Maintenon? I greatly fear it is on account of her virtue." This remark of an eminent critic, M. Hippolyte Rigault, is very just. It agrees with the opinion of another not less enlightened judge. "It seems," says M. Saint-Marc Girardin, "as if the world and posterity begrudged to Madame de Maintenon a triumph gained by reason on behalf of honesty. Unable to prevent her from succeeding by reason, the world indemnified itself by giving her a reputation for frigidity and harshness very contrary to her character. Since reason must needs be triumphant, the world insisted that it should at least be unamiable."

A fair and luminous figure has been overshadowed. We forget that the woman represented under a gloomy, almost sinister aspect, was a charmer, an enchantress whom Fénelon characterized as "reason

speaking through the mouth of the Graces," whom Racine had in mind when writing these verses of Esther: —

> "Je ne trouve qu'en vous je ne sais quelle grâce
> Qui me charme toujours, et jamais ne me lasse."[1]

Madame de Maintenon's adversaries carried the day at first against her admirers. But our own epoch, impassioned for historical verities, has revised a false judgment.

Two able and convinced writers, the Duke de Noailles and M. Théophile Lavallée, full of respect for a memory unjustly accused, have, as one may say, succeeded in resuscitating the true Madame de Maintenon. Baron de Walckenaër had already called attention to the fact that this woman, appreciated in such diverse fashions, is the one historical personage concerning whom we possess the most documents proceeding from her mouth or written by her pen. "Hence it is to be regretted," said he, "that even the most judicious historians have preferred contemporary satires to the certain and authentic testimony furnished by herself, and have converted a simple and interesting history into a vulgar and incomprehensible romance."

At present the truth has come to light. Madame de Maintenon's defenders have left nothing remain-

[1] Only in you I find a nameless grace
Which charms me always and which never tires.

ing of the invectives of Saint-Simon and the Princess Palatine against a woman who deserves the esteem of posterity whatever malevolence may say. Since the publication of the Duke de Noailles's fine work there has been a sort of literary tourney on the subject of Madame de Maintenon, and the great critic Sainte-Beuve has been umpire. "M. Lavallée," he says, "has experienced what happens to all fair minds who approach this distinguished person and take pains to know her in her ordinary life. . . . He has done justice to that mass of fantastic and odiously vague imputations which have long been in circulation concerning the pretended historical rôle of this celebrated woman. He has seen her as she was, wholly occupied with the King's salvation, his reform, his decent amusements, the interior of the royal family, and the amelioration of the people."

The revolutionary school, which likes to drag the memory of the great King through the mud, naturally detests the eminent woman who was his companion, his friend, and his consoler. Writers of this school would like to make of her a type not simply odious and fatal, but ungraceful, antipathetic, without radiance, charm, or any sort of fascination. She is too frequently recalled to mind under the aspect of a worn old woman, stiff and severe, with tearless eyes and a face without a smile. We forget that in her youth she was one of the prettiest women of her time. that her beauty was wonderfully preserved, and that in her old age she retained that

superiority of style and language, that distinction of manner and exquisite tact, that gentle firmness of character, that charm and elevation of mind, which at every period of her life gained her so much praise and so many friends.

A rapid glance at a career so full of incident and so curious to study will suffice to make us understand how much sympathetic charm must have pertained to the woman who could please Scarron and Louis XIV., Ninon de Lenclos and Madame de Sévigné, Madame de Montespan and the Queen, great ladies and nuns, prelates and little children.

Françoise d'Aubigné, the future Madame de Maintenon, came into the world, November 27, 1635, in a prison at Niort, where her father was confined, covered with debts and under an accusation of conniving with the enemy. Cradled amid lamentations instead of tender lullabies, she began life sadly. On coming out of prison, her father took her at the age of three years to Martinique, where he went to seek his fortune. He lost all he had at the gaming-table and died, leaving his wife and child in poverty. When she was ten years old Françoise d'Aubigné returned to France. Her mother confided her to the care of an aunt, Madame de Villette, who brought her up in the Protestant religion, of which her ancestor, the celebrated Théodore Agrippa d'Aubigné, had been an intrepid champion. "I very much fear," wrote Madame d'Aubigné to Madame de Villette, "that this poor little *galeuse* may give you a good

deal of trouble; that will be the result of your goodness in being willing to take her. God give her the grace to be able to requite you for it!"[1] Some time afterward, Françoise was withdrawn from the Protestant hands of Madame de Villette and entrusted to those of another and very zealous Catholic relative, Madame de Neuillant. "I ruled in the farmyard," she said afterward, "and it was there my reign commenced. . . . A little basket containing our luncheon was hung on our arms, and we were given a little book of Pibrac's quatrains, of which we had to learn several pages every day. Along with this a switch was put in our hands, and we were charged to prevent the turkeys from going where they ought not." It is pretended that at this period she received her first declaration of love, and that from a young peasant. Did she recall it on the day of her marriage with the great King?

She was afterwards placed in a convent of Ursulines at Niort, and subsequently in that of the Ursulines of rue Saint-Jacques at Paris, where she abjured Protestantism, but not without a vigorous resistance. She already possessed that gift of pleasing which she retained throughout her life. "In my childhood," she has said herself,[2] "I was the best little creature that you can imagine. . . . I was really what is called a good child, so much so that everybody loved me. . . . When I was a little

[1] Letter of July 28, 1646.

[2] *Entretiens de Saint-Cyr.*

larger I lived in the convents; you know how much I was loved by my mistresses and my companions. . . . I thought of nothing but obliging them and making myself their servant from morning to night."

An orphan and without any resources, Françoise d'Aubigné, at the age of seventeen, was married in 1652 to the famous poet Scarron, who was only forty-two years old, but paralyzed, crippled in all his members, — Scarron, the burlesque author, the buffoon *par excellence*, who demands a brevet as Queen's invalid, laughs at his afflictions, derides himself and his pains, and who, while resembling, as he said, a letter Z, while "having his arms shortened as well as his legs and his fingers as much as his arms," while being, in fine, "an abridgment of human misery," amuses all the French social world by his inexhaustible fancy, his frank, Gallic, Rabelaisian gaiety. When the marriage contract is drawn up, Scarron declares that he acknowledges in his future wife four louis of income, two large and roguish eyes, a very fine figure, a pair of beautiful hands, and much wit. The notary asks him what settlement he proposes to make on his wife. "Immortality," he answers.

What tact must not a girl of seventeen have needed to make herself respected in the society of the burlesque poet who said: "I shall not make her commit any follies, but I shall teach her a good many." Just the contrary is what will happen. Françoise d'Aubigné will moralize Scarron. She will make

his salon one of the most distinguished social centres of Paris. The best people will regard it as an honor to be admitted there. A young noble of the court will be heard to say: "If it were a question of taking liberties with the Queen or with Madame Scarron, I would not deliberate: I would sooner take them with the Queen." Even Ninon de Lenclos, Scarron's friend, will bow before such virtue. And yet it is not admirers, aspirants, who are lacking to the poet's wife, the *belle Indienne*, as people like to call her, the siren of whom Petitot has made such a charming picture in enamel, and whom Mademoiselle de Scudéry celebrates in enthusiastic terms in her romance *Clélie*, under the pseudonym of Lyrianne. Queen Christina of Sweden says to Scarron himself that she is not surprised to find him the gayest man in Paris, in spite of his afflictions, seeing that he has the most amiable wife in Paris.

With so good and charming a companion the poor poet has less merit in supporting pain more patiently than the stoics of antiquity. He died in October, 1660, in very Christian sentiments, and says on his deathbed: "My only regret is that I can leave no property to my wife, whom I have every imaginable reason to be satisfied with."

As a widow Madame Scarron seeks esteem, not love. To please while remaining virtuous, to endure, if need be, privations and even poverty, but to win the title of a strong woman, to deserve the sympathy and approbation of honest people, such is the

aim of all her efforts. Well though very simply dressed; discreet and modest, intelligent and distinguished, with that inborn elegance which luxury cannot give and which only comes by nature; pious with a sincere and gentle piety; less occupied with herself than with others; talking well and, which is much rarer, knowing how to listen; taking an interest in the joys and sorrows of her friends; skilful in amusing and consoling them; she is justly regarded as one of the most amiable and superior women in Paris. Economical and simple in her tastes, she makes her accounts balance perfectly, thanks to an annual pension of two thousand livres granted her by Queen Anne of Austria. She is cordially received by Mesdames de Sévigné, de Coulanges, de La Fayette, d'Albret, de Richelieu. This is the most tranquil and doubtless the happiest period of her life. But the death of her benefactress, the Queen-mother (January 20, 1666), deprives her of the pension which is her only resource. A noble who is very rich, but old and a debauchee, asks her in marriage, but she refuses him. She is on the point of expatriating herself to follow the Princess de Nemours, who is about to marry the King of Portugal. Her star retains her in France, where she will one day be almost Queen. She writes to Mademoiselle d'Artigny: "Contrive for me, I entreat you, the honor of being presented to Madame de Montespan when I go to bid you adieu; so that I may not have to reproach myself with

having quitted France without having seen its wonder." Madame de Montespan is not yet the mistress of Louis XIV., but her already famous beauty and her position as lady of the Queen's palace gives her influence. She finds Madame Scarron charming and obtains the renewal of her pension of two thousand livres, which prevents her going to Portugal.

Rejoiced at this solution of her difficulties, the beautiful widow, wholly occupied with serious books and works of charity, reading the Book of Job and the maxims of La Rochefoucauld, visiting the poor and bestowing alms in spite of the slenderness of her income, installs herself very modestly in a small apartment on the rue des Tournelles. Here it is that capricious Fortune is coming to surprise her. Madame de Montespan has become the mistress of the King. Already she has had two children by him: a daughter, born in 1669, who will live but three years; and a son, born in 1670, who will be the Duke du Maine. These two infants, whose birth is still a mystery, need an intelligent, devoted, discreet woman to bring them up. Madame de Montespan thinks of Madame Scarron. The wife of Colbert, the great minister, had willingly undertaken charge of the son and daughter of Louis XIV. and Mademoiselle de La Vallière. Madame Scarron, solicited by the King himself, accepts the offer made her in 1670. She becomes the governess, the second mother, of the children of Louis XIV. and Madame de Montespan. To conceal their existence they are

each placed separately, with a nurse, in a little house outside of Paris. Leaving her friends, giving up society, risking the loss of her reputation by a singular mystery, Madame Scarron courageously sacrifices herself to her new rôle. The family of adultery goes on increasing. The birth of the Count de Vexin comes in 1672, of Mademoiselle de Nantes (the future Duchess de Bourbon) in 1673, of Mademoiselle de Tours in 1674. According to Madame de Caylus, Madame Scarron is sent for each time. She hides the baby under her scarf and herself under a mask and takes a cab to Paris, dreading lest the infant may begin to cry while on the road. In 1672 she established herself in a large isolated house not far from Vaugirard. Madame de Coulanges writes at this time to Madame de Sévigné: "As for Madame Scarron, her life is an astonishing sort of thing. Without exception not a soul has intercourse with her." Louis XIV., prejudiced at first against the governess, whom he characterized as a blue-stocking, begins to recognize her good qualities. Her pension is increased from two thousand to six thousand livres.

On December 20, 1673, the legitimation of the Duke du Maine, the Count de Vexin, and Mademoiselle de Tours is registered. The following year these three children are domiciled at Versailles with Madame Scarron. She writes to her brother, July 25, 1674: "The life people lead here is very dissipated and the days pass quickly. All my little

Princes are established here, and I think forever. That, like everything else, has its good and bad side."

As soon as she set foot at court, Madame Scarron laid down a programme for herself. "There is nothing cleverer than irreproachable conduct," she says. At first Madame de Montespan congratulates herself on having near her a person so amiable, so witty, and such good company. But this fancy does not last long. The haughty favorite soon begins to torment the modest governess. Spats, reconciliations, little tiffs, begin. Madame Scarron does not attack; she defends herself. Louis XIV. does her justice and recognizes her rare merits. At the close of the year 1674 he gives her the money necessary to purchase the estate of Maintenon, fourteen leagues from Paris, ten from Versailles, and four from Chartres. The governess of the legitimated children is thenceforth styled the Marquise de Maintenon.

Were there on her side the skilfully devised Machiavelian calculations, the subtle hypocrisies, that her detractors have supposed? We do not believe it. Is it her fault if her interests are at one with her duties, if piety, which to her is an end in itself, is to become a means in consequence of unforeseen circumstances? At bottom, what does she desire above all things? To convert Louis XIV. Does she wish the adulterous commerce of the sovereign and Madame de Montespan to cease? Yes. Does she wish to become the King's mistress? No.

When Louis XIV., tired of the pride and violence of the favorite, departs from her, does Madame de Maintenon try to monopolize him for herself? Not at all. It is Mademoiselle de Fontanges who will pick up the left-hand sceptre. And when Mademoiselle de Fontanges dies, will Madame de Maintenon have the notion of replacing her? In no wise. She will have but one object: to bring back the King to the Queen, and this object she will attain.

And yet people will say, she is the friend of Madame de Montespan, she is under obligations to her. That is true; but never, even at the time when she had most need of her benefactress, has she said a word of approbation, of encouragement, for adultery. Never has she sacrificed her principles. The fact of interesting oneself in natural children, of bringing them up in a Christian manner, of pitying and loving them, is no more a laudation of their origin than the establishment of a foundling asylum is the consecration of adultery or concubinage. Is Madame de Maintenon reproached for her amiability, her attentions to Madame de Montespan? But who was there at the court of Louis XIV. who did not show respect to the favorite? Did not the Queen herself treat her kindly and accept her first as her lady of the palace and afterwards as superintendent of her household?

There are also many who accuse Madame de Maintenon of hypocrisy in her inclination to withdraw, and the promises she made herself to leave the court

as soon as possible. But why forget that ambition, like love, has its alternations of ardor and lassitude, of passion and satiety? Do not the fruits one has most desired often lose their savor the moment they are possessed? And is not reality the grave of hope? Madame de Maintenon one day said she would be an enigma to posterity. Nevertheless she will only be an enigma to herself. Ambitious and undeceived, eager for honors whose nothingness she will be sensible of, there will be no hypocrisy in her soul, but plenty of contradictions.

The great defect of historians is their desire to find characters all of a piece. In nearly all natures there is both good and evil, truth and falsehood, strength and weakness. Madame de Maintenon does not escape this common law. She merits neither the odious satires of her adversaries nor the exaggerated praises of her admirers. But we do not hesitate to declare, for our own part, that when it is a question of judging this celebrated woman, the balance ought, in our opinion, to lean to the side of eulogy rather than to that of criticism.

Madame de Maintenon's detractors reckon it a crime in her to have injured Madame de Montespan by the pious counsels she gave to Louis XIV. Would they prefer then that she should have made herself the pander of adultery, and employed her intelligence in reconciling the King with his mistress? Do they prefer the part of a go-between to that of a moralizer? She is engaged to educate the

children of Madame de Montespan, but certainly not to favorize her amours. And yet she is very well aware of the malevolence, the calumnies, to which her attitude may give rise. One of the *Entretiens de Saint-Cyr* proves this. "So there we were, irretrievably embroiled," she says, "without having had any intention of breaking off, and even without having formally done so. It certainly was not my fault, and yet if either of us had any reason to complain it was she, for she could say with truth: 'I was the cause of her elevation, I gained her the King's acquaintance and approval; she is becoming the favorite and I am driven away.' It is true I had many things to say in return. For was I wrong in accepting the King's friendship on the conditions I had laid down? Was I wrong in having given him good advice? Did not Madame de Montespan know that I would neglect no means of breaking off her guilty commerce?"

A curious thing is the respective situations of these two women, both so witty and intelligent, of whom Louis XIV. said: "I had more trouble to make peace between them than to re-establish it in Turkey." Madame de Maintenon wrote, June 14, 1679: "Madame de Montespan is absolutely determined to believe that I am trying to be the King's mistress. 'But,' said I to her, 'are there three of us then?' — 'Yes,' she answered me, 'I in name, that girl [Mademoiselle de Fontanges] in fact, and you in heart.' I replied that she paid too great heed to

her resentment. She answered that she knew my artifices and was only sorry that she had not given heed to her presentiments. She reproached me with the presents she had given me and with those of the King, and said she had nourished me and I was stifling her. Do you understand the situation? It is a curious thing that we cannot live together, and yet cannot separate. I love her and can never persuade myself that she hates me." Again Madame de Maintenon writes, in 1680: "To-day Madame de Montespan and I took a walk together arm in arm and laughing a good deal; we are on none the better terms for that."

Sovereigns or private persons, princesses or civilians' wives, great ladies or women of the people, how much they resemble each other! Had not La Bruyère good reason to say: "At court and in the city there are the same passions, the same frailties, the same pettiness, the same caprices. . . . If he has good eyes, one may easily see the little town, the rue Saint-Denis, transported as it were to Versailles and Fontainebleau."

Madame de Montespan, even while irritated with the clever governess, must, after all, have recognized that she was undergoing a sort of retributive punishment. Had she not supplanted her own friend, Mademoiselle de La Vallière? Had she not shamefully deceived Queen Marie Thérèse? Does not her conscience tell her that her chastisement is deserved? She is vanquished. Let her resign her-

self! Doubtless it is painful for this haughty Mortemart, who has always held her own with the great King, who has looked the demigod in the face, to humble herself before a woman she had rescued from poverty, before a governess who is seven years older than herself. But what can be done about it?

Thenceforward Madame de Maintenon's position is beyond attack. The politic woman has no longer any need to make a stepping-stone of the cradle of the legitimated. It is not she who brings up the last two children of Madame de Montespan and Louis XIV. (the future Duchess of Orleans and the Count de Toulouse). She has now her own settled place at court. She is sought for and flattered. When she spends a few days at her château of Maintenon, the greatest personages go there to pay their homage. Madame de Sévigné writes concerning her, July 17, 1680: "People no longer approach the lady without fear and respect, and the ministers pay court to her like the rest. . . . She is introducing the King to an entirely new region; I mean the commerce of friendship and conversation, without chicanery and without constraint; he appears charmed with it."

At the age of ten years the little Duke du Maine, Madame de Maintenon's cherished pupil, had just passed out of the hands of men. Louis XIV. rewarded the care she had bestowed on this child by appointing her lady of the bedchamber to the Dauphiness. When this princess arrives in France she

is met at Schlestadt by Bossuet and Madame de Maintenon. "If," writes Madame de Sévigné, "Madame the Dauphiness fancies that all the men and women have as much wit as these specimens, she will be greatly deceived; truly, it is a great advantage to be of the first order."[1] Madame de Maintenon possesses the boon she had so much desired, consideration. The most eminent prelates hold her in high esteem. The devout party regard her as an oracle. It is she who is laboring at the King's conversion, she who is bringing him back to the Queen, she who, with insinuating and gentle eloquence, pleads at court the cause of morality and religion.

[1] Letter of Feb. 14, 1680.

VI

THE BAVARIAN DAUPHINESS

AT the side of those imperious types which impose themselves on the attention of posterity, there is a place in history for more tranquil, gentler, and more meditative figures who, in life, remained in the shade, in silence, and who may be said to retain a sort of modesty and reserve even beyond the tomb. Princesses are met with whom the tumult of the world, the éclat of power, the splendor of luxury, could not detach from their native melancholy; who have been humble and timid in the midst of grandeurs; who have made a solitude for themselves, and who, to use Bossuet's expression, have found in their oratories, spite of all the agitations of the court, the Carmel of Elias, the desert of John, the mountain which so often witnessed the lamentations of Jesus.

There is a blending of benevolence and sadness, of tenderness and chagrin, of compassion and kindness, in the smile of these women. They seem to have occupied the highest situations only to inspire us with philosophic reflections and Christian

thoughts, to prove to us by their example that happiness does not dwell in palaces, that external things do not impart real joys, that "grandeur is a dream, youth a flower that fades, health but a deceptive name."[1] We do not sufficiently contemplate these plaintive, pale, and melancholy apparitions of history. But if one takes pains to study them seriously, he soon becomes attached to them, he prefers these Christian types to the visages of proud and sensual women which reflect all the passions of paganism. One is pleased with half tints after too glaring colors; noise makes silence beloved, and the eye, wearied by the rays of a too vivid flame, finds repose in softer lustre.

Among the number of these wise and prudent women whose career is not fruitful in dramatic catastrophes, but is none the less full of useful lessons, must be placed Marie Anne Christine Victoire, daughter of the Elector Ferdinand, Duke of Bavaria, and Dauphiness of France. The life of this Princess, born in 1660, married in 1680 to the son of Louis XIV., died at Versailles in 1690, at the age of twenty-nine, may be summed up in one word: melancholy. She was one of those women, disgusted with earth and aspiring to heaven, of whom Bossuet might have said, as he did of the Queen: "The earth, her origin and sepulchre, is not yet low enough to receive her; she would like to disappear

[1] Bossuet, *Oraison funèbre de la reine Marie-Thérèse.*

altogether before the majesty of the King of kings." Her education had been austere. The court of Munich resembled a convent. "People rose there at six o'clock every morning, heard Mass at nine, dined at ten, were present every day at Vespers, and by six in the evening there was no one there, that being the hour when they took their supper in order to go to bed at seven."[1]

Far from being dazzled by her new fortune, the young Princess did not leave the pious and patriarchal court where she passed her childhood without profound regret. She produced a good impression in her new home as soon as she made her appearance. She was not beautiful, but her grace, her manners, her natural dignity, and still more, her merit, her learning, and her kindness gave her charm. One of the persons sent by Louis XIV. to meet her wrote to the King: "Madame the Dauphiness is not pretty, Sire; but pass over the first glance and you will be very well content with her." She received Bossuet, who had gone to meet her at Schlestadt, with perfect courtesy. "I take an interest in all you have taught M. the Dauphin," she said to him; "do not, I beg you, refuse to give me your instructions also, and be assured that I will endeavor to profit by them."

The great bishop was struck by the knowledge of the Princess. She had an accurate acquaintance

[1] *Mémoires de Coulanges.*

with all the languages spoken in Europe, and even with the language of the Church, which had been taught her in childhood.[1] Bossuet was sincere when he said of her, three years later: "We admired her as soon as she appeared, and the King has confirmed our judgment."[2] Appointed First Almoner to the Dauphiness, he accompanied her from Schlestadt to Versailles. During the journey a ceremony was performed which strongly contrasted with the transports of joy the Princess had encountered on her way ever since entering France. On Wednesday, March 6, 1680, Bossuet put the ashes on her forehead in the seignorial chapel of the château of Brignicourt-sur-Saulx. "Woman," said he, "remember that thou wert taken from the dust and must one day return to it." Alas! the prediction was accomplished ten years later, and the Princess, beside whose deathbed Bossuet stood, reminded him of the solemn words of that Ash Wednesday.[3]

Louis XIV. gave his daughter-in-law the most friendly and courteous reception. She had Madame the Duchess de Richelieu for lady of honor, Madame de Maintenon for second lady of the bedchamber, and Mesdemoiselles de Laval, de Biron, de Gontaut, de Tonnesse, de Jarnac, de Rambures, as maids of

[1] Pierre de La Broue, Bishop of Mirepoix, *Oraison funèbre de la Dauphine.*

[2] Bossuet, *Oraison funèbre de la reine Marie-Thérèse.*

[3] See the learned and remarkable work of M. Floquet: *Bossuet précepteur du Dauphin.*

honor. The King came after dinner to spend several hours in the room of the Princess, where he found Madame de Maintenon, and to this visit he devoted the time he had been accustomed to pass with Madame de Montespan.

The early years of the marriage of the Dauphiness were tranquil. Her husband, who was but a year older than she, showed at this time a sincere attachment for her. The birth of their son, the Duke of Burgundy, caused transports of joy not only at court but throughout France. In the night of August 5–6, 1682, when the time of her delivery drew nigh, Louis XIV. had a mattress carried into the chamber of the Dauphiness, where he spent the night with the Queen. He encouraged his daughter-in-law with affectionate words. Several times he supported her while she walked up and down in the chamber, telling her he would be very well satisfied if she had a daughter, providing she suffered less and were promptly delivered. All the places and avenues of Versailles were made as light as day by a multitude of lanterns and torches carried by persons awaiting the happy event. The next day, when the Princess had brought a son[1] into the world, the joy bordered on delirium. Everybody took the liberty of embracing the King.[2] Spinola bit his finger in the warmth

[1] The Dauphiness was brought to bed in the Superintendent's pavilion, situated at the extremity of the south wing, opposite the Swiss lake.

[2] Abbé de Choisy, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de Louis XIV.*

of his enthusiasm, and hearing him cry out: "Sire," said he, "I ask Your Majesty's pardon; but if I had not bitten you, you would not have paid any attention to me." There were dances, illuminations, transports, everywhere. The people who were making bonfires burned even the flooring intended for the grand gallery. "Let them alone," said Louis XIV., smiling; "we will have other flooring." He showed the newly born to the crowd, and the air resounded with enthusiastic acclamations.

Madame de Maintenon wrote to her friend, Madame de Saint-Géran, the next day, August 7, 1682: "The King has made a very fine present to Madame the Dauphiness; he has had the little prince in his arms for a moment. He congratulated Monseigneur like a friend; he gave the first tidings to the Queen; in fine, everybody says he is adorable; Madame de Montespan is withering at our joy. We are living with every appearance of sincere friendship. Some people say I want to put myself in her place, not knowing either my aversion for that sort of commerce nor the aversion I wish to inspire in the King for it. Some think that I wish to bring her back to God. There is a better made heart for which I have greater hopes."

This heart, that of Louis XIV., was daily inclining more toward religion. The time of scandals was over. Every cloud had disappeared from the conjugal sky of Louis XIV. and Marie Thérèse. The quarrels of Madame de Montespan and Madame de

Maintenon were appeased. These two ladies no longer visited each other. But whenever they met elsewhere they spoke and even held conversations so lively and cordial in appearance that any one who had seen them and was not conversant with court intrigues would have thought them the best friends in the world.[1] Speaking of Madame de Maintenon, the Queen said gratefully: "The King has never treated me with so much tenderness as since he listened to her." The year 1683 promised to be a happy one for the saintly and gentle companion of Louis XIV. But death was approaching rapidly. A terrible malady was about to carry off the Queen, who was only forty-five years old.

This good and virtuous princess of whom Bossuet has said: "She goes with the Lamb, for she is worthy"; this Queen who wore the lilied mantle as if it were haircloth; this woman who was one of those elect souls of whom the Apostle Saint John says: "They are without spot before the throne of God, *sine maculâ enim sunt ante thronum Dei*"; this pious Marie Thérèse died, as she had lived, with angelic sweetness. Louis XIV., who had caused her so many troubles, mourned for her sincerely. "What!" he cried, "there is no more a Queen in France. What! I am a widower; I could never have believed it, and yet I am so, and of the most meritorious princess. . . . This is the first pain she has ever given me."

[1] *Souvenirs de Madame de Caylus.*

Louis XIV., so often accused of coldness and egotism, had on the contrary a great fund of kindness. He had been too affectionate a son to be an absolutely bad husband. He wrote on the subject of the death of Anne of Austria, in the Memoirs intended for the Dauphin: "However great might be the courage on which I wished to pique myself, it was impossible that a son bound by the ties of nature could see his mother die without excessive grief, since even those toward whom she had acted as an enemy could not avoid regretting her, and avowing that there had never been a more sincere piety, a more intrepid firmness, more generous a bounty. The vigor with which this princess had maintained my dignity when I could not myself defend it, was the most important and useful service that could ever be rendered me. . . . My respect for her was not one of those constrained duties which are performed for the sake of decorum. The habit I had formed of having ordinarily the same dwelling and the same table with her, the assiduity with which I was seen to visit her several times every day, no matter how pressing my affairs might be, were not a law I had imposed on myself for reasons of State, but a sign of the pleasure I took in her company."

No; whatever people may say, the man who wrote these lines was not wanting in heart. No one has felt more keenly that incomparable grief, that rending which tears from you more than half your soul: the loss of a mother. Mademoiselle de Montpensier,

an ocular witness of the death of Anne of Austria, says that at the moment when she yielded her last breath, Louis XIV. "was stifling; they threw water on him; he was suffocating." All night long he shed torrents of tears.

The death of Queen Marie Thérèse did not cause him such painful anguish, but still he manifested a keen sensibility on this occasion. "The court," says Madame de Caylus, "was pained by his grief. That of Madame de Maintenon, which I observed very closely, seemed to me sincere and founded upon esteem and gratitude. I would not say as much for the tears of Madame de Montespan, whom I remember to have seen entering Madame de Maintenon's apartments, but I cannot say why or wherefore. All that I know is that she wept a good deal and that all her actions seemed to show a trouble founded on that of her mind, and perhaps on the fear of falling into the hands of her husband."

Marie Thérèse died July 30, 1683, at the château of Versailles, in the bedchamber which has a view of the Orangery and also of the Swiss lake, and of which we have already had several occasions to speak.[1] After the Queen's death this room was occupied by the Dauphiness, who, from the hierarchical point of view, had become the principal woman of the court. The King wished to make the salon of his daughter-in-law the most brilliant centre in

[1] Room No. 115 of the *Notice du Musée de Versailles.*

France. He sometimes went to see her, taking with him his rarest jewels and stuffs for her to select from; the rest were divided into lots which the maids of honor and ladies who had been presented drew lots for, or perhaps had the honor of playing for with her, and even with the King. While hoca was in fashion, and before the King had wisely interdicted so dangerous a game, he played it in the apartments of Madame the Dauphiness; but when he lost he paid as many louis as the others had staked small pieces.[1]

However, in spite of all the court amusements, the Dauphiness yielded to an invincible sadness. She was stifling in this atmosphere of intrigues, agitations, and tumultuous pleasures. Disgusted with that "region where joys are visible but false, and whose vexations hidden but real,"[2] where "eagerness for the spectacles, the éclat, and the applause at the theatres of Molière and Harlequin, for banquets, hunts, ballets, and tourneys conceals so many anxieties and fears," she found like Bruyère that "a healthy mind acquires at court a taste for solitude and retreat." In spite of all his obliging attentions, Louis XIV. could not succeed in making her love the world nor induce her to hold court receptions. She passed her life sadly in the small rooms contiguous to her Versailles apartments with

[1] *Souvenirs de Madame de Caylus.*
[2] La Bruyère, *De la Cour.*

a German woman whom she liked, and who was called La Bessola, as her sole companion.

This chambermaid, whom the Princess Palatine represents under an odious aspect, had nothing bad about her, according to Madame de Caylus. Nevertheless, she was accused of keeping the princess sequestrated, as one might say, and preventing her from responding to the King's gracious attentions. The Dauphin, tired of the perpetual tête-à-tête of his wife and La Bessola, who always talked in German, a language he was unacquainted with, sought other society. He was smitten with Mademoiselle de Rambures, one of his wife's maids of honor, and he fell into the habit of spending most of his time at the house of his natural sister, the beautiful and witty Princess de Conti, the daughter of Louis XIV. and Mademoiselle de La Vallière.

The Dauphiness did not even try to retain a heart which was escaping from her. Either through timidity or lack of self-confidence, she accepted her lot with painful resignation, while suffering bitterly on account of it. Hopeless of consoling her, Louis XIV. left her to the solitude from which nothing could induce her to emerge, and she ended by being deserted by all the court as well as by the King. Madame de Caylus remarks with much justice: "Perhaps the good qualities of the Princess contributed to her isolation. The enemy of scandal and mockery, she could neither endure nor comprehend the raillery and malignant style of the court, all the

less because she did not understand its subtleties." Madame de Caylus adds this judicious observation: "I have seen foreigners, even those whose spirit seemed most friendly toward French manners, sometimes disconcerted by our continual irony."

A painting by Delutel, after Mignard,[1] now hung in the Hall of the Queen's Guards, represents the Dauphiness surrounded by her husband and her three sons. The Dauphin, wearing a red velvet coat, is sitting near a table, caressing a dog. The Princess is at the other side of the table, with the little Duke of Berry[2] on her lap. In front of her the Duke of Anjou,[3] in a blue robe, is sitting on a cushion; the Duke of Burgundy, in a red robe and wearing the order of the Holy Spirit, is standing up and holding a lance. In the air two Loves support a rich drapery with one hand and scatter flowers with the other. This painting seems to breathe tranquillity. A charming quiet and satisfaction marks the aspect of the Dauphiness. But the picture is more allegorical than real, and does not show the Princess as she actually was. Her vexations, her sufferings, her gloomy presentiments, do not appear in it. This is not the exact image of the woman about whom Madame de La Fayette says in her Memoirs: "This poor Princess sees nothing but

[1] No. 2116 of the *Notice du Musée de Versailles.*

[2] The Duke of Berry, born August 31, 1686.

[3] The Duke of Anjou (the future Philip V. of Spain), born December 19, 1683.

the worst for herself and takes no part whatever in festivities. She has very bad health and a sad disposition which, added to the little consideration she enjoys, deprives her of the pleasure which any one except the Princess of Bavaria would feel in arriving at almost the first place in the world."

Far from rejoicing at her lofty fortune, she longed for Germany where her childhood had passed so modestly, and said to another German woman, Madame the Duchess of Orleans (the Princess Palatine): "We are both of us very unhappy, but the difference between us is that you tried to avoid it as much as you could, while I desired with all my might to come here; therefore I have deserved my unhappiness more than you." She thought like Massillon that "grandeur is a weight which wearies," "that nothing which must pass away can be great; it is but a theatrical decoration; death closes the scene and the representation; each lays aside the pomps belonging to his character and his fictitious titles, and both sovereign and slave are reduced to their nothingness and primitive vileness."

The Dauphiness had a presentiment of her approaching end. People thought her mad because she was constantly saying that she felt herself irrevocably lost. But the poor Princess, who well knew that her moral and physical sufferings were but too real, smiled sadly when people seemed incredulous concerning them. "I shall have to die to justify myself," said she. Bossuet has remarked in his

funeral oration on Queen Marie Thérèse: "Even innocent souls have the tears and the bitterness of penitence." Melancholy and piety are not incompatible; no sky is so clear as to have no clouds, and Christ Himself has wept.

Short in duration, long in suffering, the life of the Dauphiness was hidden beneath a sombre veil. This young Princess, for whom Providence had at first seemed to reserve the most brilliant destiny, was to die at the age of twenty-nine, worn out by chagrin and consumed by languor. Convinced that her last delivery had killed her, she tenderly embraced her son, the Duke of Berry, and as she gave him her blessing, she repeated this line of *Andromache*: —

"Ah! mon fils, que tes jours coûtent cher à ta mère!"[1]

The earth, which was like an exile to her, seemed to her, moreover, unworthy of regrets. She died "willingly and with calmness," according to the expression of her compatriot the Duchess of Orleans. A few hours before breathing her last she had said to this Princess, her companion in misfortune: "To-day I shall prove that I have not been mad in complaining of my sufferings."

[1] Ah! my son, how dear thy life has cost thy mother!

VII

THE MARRIAGE OF MADAME DE MAINTENON

"I HAVE had an astonishing fortune, but it is not my work. I am where you see me without having desired it, or hoped for it, or foreseen it. I say this only to you, because the world would not believe it."

Thus Madame de Maintenon expressed herself in one of her conversations with the Demoiselles of Saint-Cyr, and we believe this appreciation is exact.

The premature death of the Queen was an event which surprised everybody. Twenty-three years before, August 26, 1660, she who then called herself Madame Scarron had just been present at the solemn entry of Louis XIV. and Marie Thérèse into their good city of Paris. She wrote the next day to her friend, Madame de Villarceaux: "I do not think anything so beautiful can ever have been seen, and the Queen must have retired last night very well satisfied with the husband she has chosen."

He who should then have said to the wife of the burlesque poet: "This husband whom you admire so much will one day be your own," would certainly

have seemed to her a strange prophet. The fictions of romance are not nearly so prodigious as the realities of history, and when Madame de Maintenon at the age of fifty, saw a king of forty-seven, and what a king! come to offer to be her husband, she must have thought herself the plaything of a dream. One would be tempted to believe that she could only have been the companion of an aging sovereign who had already lost the greater part of his prestige. But the absolute contrary is true.

The year when Louis XIV. espoused Scarron's widow was the apogee, the zenith, of the royal star. Never had the sun of the great King been more imposing, nor his haughty device: *Nec pluribus impar*, more dazzling. It was the epoch when, in face of his motionless enemies, he enlarged and fortified the frontiers of the realm, conquered Strasbourg, bombarded Genoa and Algiers, finished the luxurious constructions of his splendid Versailles, was the terror of Europe and the idol of France.

And yet Louis XIV. was in love with Madame de Maintenon while Madame de Maintenon was not in love with Louis XIV.! She had veneration, gratitude, devotion for him, but not love. There is nothing surprising in that. Women, in fact, are seldom enamoured of the men to whom they owe their fortune. In general, they like better to protect than to be protected. They find it sweeter to inspire gratitude than to experience it. What they like best of all is to show their superiority, and,

precisely because their sex seems to be condemned by nature to a dependent situation, they are happy when the rôles are exchanged, when it is they who dominate, protect, oblige. Madame de Maintenon owed Louis XIV. too much to be enamoured of him.

Let us add that the age at which she married him was no longer that of love, and that the simplicity, the freshness of ideas and sentiments of a young *ingénue* from across the Rhine cannot be expected in a woman of fifty. Madame de Maintenon felt that the King would have been ridiculous if he had loved her as he did Mademoiselle de La Vallière, and that the time for erotic ecstasies was irrevocably passed. She justly reflected that Louis XIV. was faithful to God rather than to her, and that the fear of hell and the desire for salvation had the greatest share in the unexpected change which had been suddenly produced in the morals of a sovereign until then so voluptuous and so fickle. In the Louis XIV. of 1684 the devotee took precedence of the lover, piety carried the day against passion, and it was religion still more than tenderness, more even than habit, which prevented Madame de Maintenon from having rivals.

To sum up, the King's sentiment for her was of the most complex kind. There was in it a mingling of religion and physical love, a calculation of reason and an impulse of the heart, an aspiration after the mild joys of family life and romantic inclination, a sort of compact between French good sense,

subjugated by the wit, tact, and wisdom of an eminent woman, and Spanish imagination, allured by the notion of having extricated this elect woman from poverty in order to make her almost a queen. Finally, it must be noted that Louis XIV., always spiritual, always religious, was intimately convinced that Madame de Maintenon had been sent to him by heaven for his salvation, and that the pious counsels of this saintly woman, who knew how to render devotion so amiable and attractive, seemed to him to be so many inspirations from on high.

It must not be believed, however, that the affection of Louis XIV. for Madame de Maintenon was purely ideal. If the soul counted in it for nearly all, the senses stood for something. On this head we shall content ourselves with invoking the testimony of the Abbé de Choisy: —

"He was unwilling to remarry," says the abbé, "through tenderness for his people. He already had three grandsons, and wisely judged that the princes of a second marriage might, in course of time, cause civil wars. On the other hand, he could not dispense with a wife. Madame de Maintenon pleased him greatly. Her gentle and insinuating wit promised him an agreeable intercourse capable of recreating him after the cares of royalty. Her person was still engaging, and her age prevented her from having children."

It must not be forgotten, moreover, that the life of women who are veritably beautiful resembles

that of nature in having its bright autumnal days, its Saint Martin's summer. The time of conquests with such women is far more prolonged than people ordinarily believe. The truth in respect to this is unknown because of a widespread prejudice which limits feminine successes to a certain age, and because lovers, being no longer flattered by the affection of women who are not young, sometimes take as much pains to hide their passion as they would to display it if their idols were only twenty. For my own part I am persuaded that men above forty are less pleasing than women of the same age. Their money, their position, or their wit may still procure them successes, but deprived of these advantages they would produce no impression. On the other hand, women who have passed their fortieth year, when their beauty is real, still preserve charms which make them loved for themselves independently of any advantage except their beauty. But this does not prevent the men who make laws and impose ideas from asserting that a woman of thirty is as old as a man of forty. To our mind, this theory is merely another proof of masculine fatuity.

Madame de Maintenon is not the only example of a woman whose prestige has survived her youth. Diana of Poitiers was nineteen years older than Henry II. She was forty-eight when the prince ascended the throne, and when he died, twelve years later, she was still his mistress, the queen of his heart. The son of Madame de Sévigné was only

twenty-four when he became enamoured of Ninon de Lenclos, then fifty-five, and gave up Champmeslé, then in the full splendor of her youth and talent, for her. Like Diana of Poitiers and Ninon de Lenclos, Madame de Maintenon was remarkably well preserved. She had never had any children, and the regularity of her conduct had contributed to banish wrinkles from her noble and tranquil visage. She reminded one of those last fair days of autumn when the sun's rays, though they dazzle less, have none the less a penetrating softness. As the Abbé de Choisy says: "She was not young, but she had lively and brilliant eyes, her face sparkled with intelligence."

Even Saint-Simon, her pitiless detractor, is obliged to admit "that she had much wit, incomparable grace, an easy and sometimes a reserved and deferential air, together with a manner of speech which was gentle, just, well-chosen as to words, and naturally eloquent and brief." Lamartine, that admirable genius who had an intuitive appreciation of things, has defined the sentiment of Louis XIV. better than any one: "The scruples of Louis XIV. had been aided by his attraction toward Madame de Maintenon, a mature beauty, but preserved by the retirement and chastity of her life from that worldly evaporation which soon withers other women. An attachment to Madame de Maintenon seemed to him almost the same thing as an attachment to virtue itself. The charms of confidence and piety, intercourse with a spirit both

upright and refined, the pride of raising what one loves to one's own level, and finally, it must be said to the King's honor, the safe counsels he received from this superior woman,—all these lofty and tender emotions had increased Madame de Maintenon's empire, so feminine yet so virile, to absolute domination."[1]

It appears that Louis XIV. was barely a widower when he offered her his hand. M. de La Rochefoucauld had taken her by the arm at the very moment when the Queen's soul departed, and pushing her into the royal apartment, had said to her: "This is not the time to leave the King; he needs you."

For an instant a project of marriage between Louis XIV. and the Infanta of Portugal was talked of. But this rumor was speedily contradicted. The King preferred Madame de Maintenon to the youngest and most brilliant princesses of Europe.

M. Lavallée, who has made a conscientious study of Madame de Maintenon's life, has fixed upon the first six months of the year 1684 as the period when the secret marriage was contracted, but has not been able to ascertain the exact day. It was mysteriously celebrated in a private oratory of Versailles by the Archbishop of Paris, in presence of Père La Chaise who said the Mass, of Bontemps, first valet-de-chambre to the King, and of Madame de Montchevreuil, one of Madame de Maintenon's best friends.

[1] Lamartine, *Étude sur Bossuet.*

Saint-Simon speaks of it with horror as "the most profound humiliation, the most public, most lasting, most unheard-of," a humiliation "which posterity will be unwilling to credit, reserved by fortune, not to dare mention Providence here, for the haughtiest of kings." This was not Arnauld's opinion: "I do not know," he writes, "what can be reprehended in this marriage contracted according to the regulations of the Church. It is not humiliating except in the estimation of the feeble-minded, who think it a weakness in the King to be able to resolve on marrying a woman older than himself and so far below him in rank. This marriage unites him with a person whose mind and virtue he esteems, and in intercourse with whom he finds innocent pleasures which recreate him after his great occupations." [1]

Madame de Maintenon seemed to have attained the summit of her desires. But she was too intelligent, she had studied the problems of human destiny too closely and anxiously, not to be attacked by sadness. It was she who wrote: "Before being at court I can testify that I had never known ennui; but I have experienced it thoroughly since then, and I believe I never could have borne up under it if I had not thought that it was there God wished me to be. There is no true happiness but in serving God."

This melancholy of which the expression incessantly recurs, like a plaintive and monotonous re-

[1] Arnauld, letter to M. de Vancel, June 3, 1688.

frain, in Madame de Maintenon's letters, is all the more striking because it is a profound instruction. Here we have a woman, better say a fairy, who, at the age when the most splendid beauties hear the hour strike for their retirement, arrives at a truly prodigious situation and at fifty years of age takes possession of a sovereign of forty-seven in all the prestige of victory and power; a woman who with an ability that borders on witchery supplants all the fairest, richest, and noblest young girls in the world, not one of whom would not have been proud to unite herself with the great King; a woman who, after having been several times reduced to poverty, becomes, next to Louis XIV., the most important personality in France! And yet she is not happy! Is it because the King does not love her enough? Not at all. For the letters he writes her if he is obliged to remain away from her for several days are expressed in this fashion: "I profit by the occasion of Montchevreuil's departure to assure you of a verity which pleases me too much to let me tire of telling it to you; it is that I cherish you always, that I esteem you more highly than I can express, and that in fine, whatever affection you may have for me, I have still more for you, being with all my heart entirely yours."[1]

If she is sad, is it because one step yet remains to be taken in the marvellous ladder of her fortune?

[1] Letter written during the siege of Mons, April, 1691.

Is it because she has not been able to transform her almost royal armchair into a throne? In no wise. If she had been recognized as Queen she would still have remained sorrowful, and her brother might still have said to her: "Had you then a promise of espousing the Eternal Father?"

However, she had converted a fickle man into a constant one. This quinquagenarian had fixed the sovereign whose heart La Vallière with all her love, Montespan with all her wit, had not been able to retain. During more than thirty years she was to reign without a rival over the soul of the greatest of all kings, and it was not the monarch alone but the monarchy which was to incline respectfully before her. The whole court was at her feet, soliciting a word, a glance. As the ladies of Saint-Cyr say in their notes, "parliaments, princes, cities, regiments, addressed themselves to her as to the King; none of the nobles of the realm, the cardinals and bishops, knew any other way." She was at the culminating point of repute, consideration, and fortune, and yet, I repeat, she was not happy!

Fénelon wrote to her, October 4, 1689: "God often tries others by crosses which appear as crosses. You He desires to crucify by apparent prosperity, and to give you a clear knowledge of the nothingness of the world by means of the wretchedness attached to all that is most dazzling therein."

Arrived at the height of grandeur, Madame de Maintenon experienced that disquietude, that fa-

tigue, which is nearly always the companion of satisfied ambition. She was tempted to say with La Bruyère: "Two thirds of my life are over; why disturb myself so much about what remains? The most brilliant fortune is not worth the torment which I give myself. Thirty years will destroy those giants of power which were seen to raise their heads by dint of violence, and all those whom I beheld so eagerly and by whom I hoped to attain greatness; the greatest of boons, if any boons there be, is repose, retirement, and a place which would be one's own."

Arrived at an incredible position, the wife of the greatest king on earth regretted Scarron's house — she says it herself — "as the duck regrets its muddy pond." The spectacle of grandeurs seen too near at hand no longer dazzled her eyes. Taught by experience she said with La Fontaine: —

"Que la Fortune vend ce qu'on croit qu'elle donne,"[1]

and if her mind, fatigued with luxury, power, and glory, was transported back to the days of mediocrity, it was because she had then neither a marquisate of Maintenon nor an apartment on the same footing with that of Louis XIV., while she did possess two treasures, precious in far other wise, which were hers in Scarron's dwelling, but which she had lost in the Versailles of the Sun-King — two treasures really beautiful, truly inestimable, one of which is called Youth and the other Gaiety.

[1] How Fortune sells what she is supposed to give!

VIII

MADAME DE MAINTENON'S APARTMENT

PEOPLE forget quickly in France, and veneration for the past is dwindling, along with every other sort of veneration. If time is a destroyer, man is a still greater one: *Tempus edax, homo edacior.* Could one believe that the apartment of Madame de Maintenon, that celebrated apartment in which, during thirty years, Louis XIV. passed a great part of his days and evenings, is now merely a small museum containing nothing but pictures of the battles of the French Revolution? There is not a single piece of furniture belonging to the time of Louis XIV.; not a portrait of Madame de Maintenon; not a souvenir, not an inscription which recalls the illustrious companion of the great King! Ignorant and heedless, strangers in our own land, we spurn with disdainful feet the débris which we should hold sacred. One might fancy us embarrassed by the importance of our annals, the abundance of our glories. We look with indifference at our monuments and our ruins. How many there are who visit the palace of Versailles without troub-

MADAME DE MONTESPAN.

ling themselves to inquire for the room of Madame de Maintenon or that of Marie Antoinette! It would be tiresome and expensive to buy and consult a catalogue.

It would be well to bring about a reaction against this forgetfulness of traditions, this neglect of the past. History needs Cuviers as nature does. History is a great drama the decorations and scenes of which should be revived as well as the personages. To this life of the dead, movement is necessary, the animation of resuscitated actors whose faces are beheld and whose voices listened to. The work of reconstruction should be complete. M. Theophile Lavallée has remarked in the introduction he has composed to a learned and curious work by M. Le Roi,[1] that in spite of the attempts that have been made, it may be said that the history of the château of Versailles has yet to be written.

"It would be fortunate in the existing period of revolutions, demolitions, and transformations if it could be done quickly; for Versailles, that great creation of Louis XIV., has been subjected, especially since the establishment of historical galleries to such distressing alterations, that it is no longer recognizable save on the exterior."

I do not deny that the general idea which presided over the restoration of the palace may have had a

[1] *Curiosités historiques sur Louis XIII., Louis XIV., et Louis XV.*, by M. Le Roi, curator of the Library of Versailles.

certain grandeur from the patriotic point of view. But considered from that of art and history it was absolutely bad.

To place the annals of the Revolution and the Empire in the Sanctuary of Monarchy by divine right was to deprive the dwelling-place of the great King of all its distinctive features. The image of Napoleon is as much out of place at Versailles as the statue of Louis XIV. would be on the summit of the Vendôme column.

It must not be forgotten, however, if one desires to be just, that Louis-Philippe was far from being free to act in the matter of the Versailles restorations. All Europe was pervaded by a revolutionary influence so violent that the restoration of the palace of Absolute Monarchy was a very difficult thing.

At the moment when the work was undertaken, the time seemed to be drawing nigh when one might say with the poet: "The ruins themselves have perished." *Etiam periere ruinæ.* In his *Génie du Christianisme* Chateaubriand had written apropos of Versailles: "This palace which is like a great city by itself, these marble stairways which seem to rise to the clouds, these statues, these reservoirs, these woods, are now either crumbling, or covered with moss, or withered, or overthrown."

Count Alexandre de Laborde relates that a traveller who had seen Versailles in all its pomp in 1789, at the opening of the States General, was curi-

ous to return there after several years of absence. Hastening across the grass that was growing in the courts, he entered this dwelling of kings and found solitude, devastation, sick-beds in the gilded galleries, flocks pasturing in the gardens, statues thrown down and mutilated. Then plunging into the adjacent woods he climbed the hill of Satory, and as the last rays of the sun sadly illumined the majestic and melancholy edifice in the distance, he repeated this striking passage from the author of *Les Ruines:* "Here was the seat of a powerful empire; these places now so deserted were once animated by a living multitude; these walls, where now a gloomy silence reigns, resounded with festivities and shouts of gladness, and now behold what remains of a vast domination: a lugubrious skeleton, an obscure and empty souvenir, a deathlike solitude; the palace of kings has become the resort of fallow deer! How has so much glory been eclipsed?"[1]

Such was, let us not forget it, the degradation of the château of Versailles, when Louis-Philippe, in spite of the outcries of the modern iconoclasts, undertook to repair it. The Citizen-King could not save the palace of the Sun-King otherwise than by placing it, as one might say, under the tutelage of republican and imperial glories. To obtain pardon for an attempt contrary to the destructive interests of the demagogues, he had to commission a horde of

[1] Volney, *Les Ruines.*

second-rate artists whose works were much more remarkable for their number than their merit. Thence arose this confusion between the most incongruous genres; this bizarre assemblage of glories which seem astonished to find themselves side by side; this Pantheon which has the characteristics of a Babel.

M. Lavallée remarks with much justice: "The National Museum has caused the interior of the château of Versailles to undergo a complete transformation. The intention of this museum was excellent, but the execution is not on a level with it. Undertaken by men little versed in the history of the seventeenth century, it has unfortunately ruined the most interesting parts of the château, and it is thus that Madame de Maintenon's apartment, now almost unrecognizable, is occupied by three galleries of the campaigns of 1793, 1794, 1795.

It is certain now that the persons employed in the restoration of Versailles did not even know the site of Madame de Maintenon's apartment. It was on that account that no one thought of placing a portrait of this celebrated woman in the rooms she formerly occupied. They might easily have decided the point by studying Saint-Simon with moderate attention. But no one took this trouble. In order to solve the question it was necessary for M. Le Roi to publish, in 1848, the opuscule entitled: "In what part of the château of Versailles was the apartment of Madame de Maintenon situated?" The

conclusions arrived at in this work leave no further room for doubt. The marble staircase, or staircase of the Queen, ended in a vestibule. At the left of this vestibule is the hall of the King's guards.[1] At the right, opposite this hall, is Madame de Maintenon's apartment. At present the traces of it are barely discoverable. In fact, it is not merely entirely stripped of furniture, but it has been shortened by the stairway constructed by Louis-Philippe in order to carry the marble staircase to the attics, which cuts in two the former apartment of the King's companion.

This apartment, en suite with that of Louis XIV., was composed of four rooms, the two ante-chambers of which now form but a single room (the hall of 1795).[2] Next to these ante-chambers came Madame de Maintenon's bedchamber (hall of 1794).[3] This room, which has been subdivided since the establishment of the historical galleries in order to carry the marble staircase up to the second story, formed in the time of Louis XIV. one large room lighted by three windows. Between the door by which it was entered and the chimney-piece, now destroyed,[4] was, says Saint-Simon, "the King's armchair against

[1] Room No. 120 of the *Notice du Musée*, by M. Soulié.

[2] Room No. 141 of the *Notice du Musée.*

[3] Room No. 142 of the *Notice du Musée.*

[4] This chimney-piece was at the end of the room, at the right of the picture representing the combat of Boussu, No. 2295 of the *Notice.*

the wall, a table in front of him, and a folding-chair around it for the minister who was working. On the other side of the chimney-piece a niche of red damask, an armchair, where Madame de Maintenon sat with a small table in front of her. A little further off was her bed, in an alcove.[1] Opposite the foot of the bed a door and five steps."[2]

At home with the King, says Saint-Simon once more, "they were each in his armchair, with a table in front of each, in the two chimney corners, she on the side next the bed, the King with his back to the wall, on the side of the door of the ante-chamber, and two stools in front of his table, one for the minister who was coming to work and the other for his bag."

In fine, there was nothing splendid about this apartment. "I do not know," says M. Lavallée, "if the chambermaid of some parvenu of our own days would be content with this unique chamber where Louis XIV. came to work, and where Madame de Maintenon ate, slept, dressed herself, and received the whole court, and which every one entered as she said, as if into a church. For that

[1] Madame de Maintenon's bed was in the place now occupied by the stucco staircase, built under the reign of Louis-Philippe, which continues the marble staircase. The five steps which led to the fourth and last room of the apartment (grand cabinet of Madame de Maintenon — room No. 143 of the *Notice*) have been removed, the flooring of the latter having been lowered.

[2] Introduction to *Curiosités historiques* on Louis XIII., Louis XIV., and Louis XV., by M. Le Roi.

matter, the princes, the princesses, even the King himself, were not more commodiously lodged. Everything had been sacrificed to pomp, brilliancy, and display in this magnificent château. Louis XIV. was perpetually on the stage and playing his part as king uninterruptedly, but amidst all these paintings, gildings, marbles, and splendors not a single one of the conveniences of our days was to be had; one froze in these immense rooms, these grand galleries, these chambers open on every side."

Now that we know the apartment of the companion of Louis XIV., let us glance at the existence she led there. She generally rose between six and seven o'clock and went at once to Mass, where she received communion three or four times a week. Her day was spent in good works, writing, and in visits to Saint-Cyr. The King came regularly to see her every day between five and six in the evening and remained until ten, the hour when he went to supper.

Madame de Maintenon's retinue was very modest. The King gave her 48,000 livres annually, plus a New Year's gift of 12,000 livres, nearly all of which sum was devoted to alms. Her old servant Manon, who had been her companion in days of adversity, still remained with her, and she had also a few silent and respectful domestics. Her existence may be described briefly as a life of abnegation, constraint, and obedience. Her rank which placed her between private persons and queens being indeterminate, it

would have been difficult for her to have lived habitually amid the etiquette of the court. Hence she seldom left her apartment. Voltaire says that her elevation, so far as she was concerned, was simply a retreat.

While Madame de Maintenon thus withdraws into herself, the court around her is full of commotion. The marble staircase at the foot of which is the apartment of the Dauphin, and which leads to those of the Dauphiness, Madame de Maintenon and Louis XIV., is incessantly crowded with those men "who are masters of their gestures, their eyes, their faces, who hide their evil functions, smile at their enemies, disguise their passions."[1] They ascend this staircase to attend the levee and the couchee of the King. They pass through the hall of the guards (room No. 120 of the *Notice du Musée*), the King's ante-chamber (room No. 121), and then into the *Chambre des Bassans*, where they await the monarch's rising.

The *Chambre des Bassans*,[2] so called, says Félibien, because several pictures by Bassano were hung above the doors and the wainscoting, is the waiting-room which precedes the bedchamber of Louis XIV.

[1] La Bruyère, *La Cour.*

[2] Room No. 123 of the *Notice du Musée.* Under Louis XIV. this hall, which at present forms the salon of the Œil-de-Bœuf, was divided into two rooms: the first was that of the Bassans, the second served as the King's bedchamber until 1691, when he installed himself in the succeeding room (No. 124) to remain there until his death.

It has several different entries: the familiar entry for the princes, the grand entry for the great crown officials, the first entry for those whose duties entitle them to come in, the entry for the officials of the King's chamber. The ceremonial is regulated in the most precise manner. The two leaves of the folding door are never opened except for the Dauphin and the princes of the blood. The door opens for each person admitted and closes at once behind him.

"One must gently scratch the doors of the chamber, the ante-chambers, and the cabinets, not rudely strike them. Moreover, if one wishes to pass out when the doors are closed, it is not permissible to open them one's self, but they must be opened by the usher."[1]

Louis XIV. rises at eight o'clock and says his prayers. Then he steps out of the balustrade surrounding his bed and says: "To the council." He works with his ministers until half-past twelve. Afterwards, escorted by the princes, the princesses, the officials, and the great nobles, he goes to Mass, crossing the Gallery *des Glaces*, where any one may see him, present a petition, and even speak to him. He passes through the salons of War, Apollo, Mercury, Mars, Diana, Venus, and Abundance[2] to reach

[1] *Etat de France* in 1694.

[2] These salons, which form what are called the grand apartments of the King, are numbered 112, 111, 110, 109, 108, 107, 106, in the *Notice du Musée*.

the chapel,[1] which rises from the ground floor to the second story. The altar and the pulpit, in which Bossuet, Bourdaloue, and Massillon preached by turns, are below. The upper part is occupied by galleries.

"The nobles form a vast circle at the foot of the altar, where they remain standing with their backs turned to the priest and the sacred mysteries, and their faces raised towards their King, who is seen kneeling on a rostrum, and on whom all their minds and hearts seem to be fixed. One cannot fail to see a kind of subordination in this custom, for the people seem to adore the prince, and the prince to adore God."[2]

After Mass the King dines, usually on few dishes, and alone in his chamber. At two o'clock he shoots in the park, walks in the gardens, or hunts the deer either on horseback or in an open carriage. Toward five or six o'clock he repairs, as we have said already, to Madame de Maintenon's apartment and

[1] This chapel must not be confounded with the existing chapel, which was not inaugurated until 1710. The Salon of Hercules (No. 106 of the *Notice*), which now serves as entrance to the grand apartments, was the chapel from 1682 to 1710. That part of the palace containing the Salon of Hercules and the vestibule below it, unites the north wing to the centre. The chapel, which combined the height of the ground floor and that of the first story, was on this site. A picture, representing Dangeau receiving investiture as grand master of the order of St. Lazarus, reproduces its interior. This picture is in room 9 of the *Notice du Musée*, and is numbered 164.

[2] La Bruyère, *La Cour*.

there he works again with his ministers during a great part of the evening. He leaves her towards nine or ten o'clock and then goes either to the play or to the Apartment.

What is designated by this title is the reunion of the whole court in the apartments of the King. The *Mercure galant* of 1682 gives a curious description of these soirées which were established in the first year of the definitive installation of Louis XIV. at Versailles. "The King," says the *Mercure*, "permits admission to his grand apartment of Versailles on Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday of each week, and all sorts of games to be played there from six in the evening until ten, and these days are called Apartment days."

People ascend the great staircase of the King, or of the Ambassadors, that magnificent staircase decorated by the sculptures of Coysevox, and the paintings of Lebrun and Van der Meulen.[1] They enter the salon of Abundance,[2] so-called because there are bas-reliefs representing Abundance over the marble door. Refreshment tables are laid in this salon, which is adorned with pictures by Carracci, Guido, and Paul Veronese. Then they pass into the salon of Venus, filled with splendid furniture, and

[1] The staircase of the Ambassadors, also called grand staircase of the King, was in the north wing, and led to the grand apartments of Louis XIV. It was destroyed in 1750 in consequence of the alterations made in the apartments of Louis XV.

[2] Room 106 of the *Notice du Musée*.

then into that of Diana, where the billiard tables are, and where orange trees are blooming in silver tubs. The salon of Mars, where one may admire six of Titian's portraits, *Jesus and the pilgrims to Emmaus*, by Veronese, *The Family of Darius at the feet of Alexander*, by Lebrun, is the room where they play. In the middle of it, on a table covered with green velvet, there is a *trou-madame* of inlaid wood surrounded by hangings of red velvet fringed with gold. There are also tables for card-playing and for games of chance. The next room is the salon of Mercury, where the state bed is, and pictures by Carracci, Titian, and Van Dyck.

Then comes the magnificent salon of Apollo, which is the Throne room. At the end of it is a platform covered by a Persian carpet with a gold ground on which stands a silver throne eight feet high. Four statues of infants carrying flower baskets support the seat and the back, which are covered with red velvet. Domenichino's *David*, Rubens' *Tomyris*, and pictures by Guido and Van Dyck adorn this salon, which is that where Louis XIV. gives audience to foreign ambassadors, and which on Apartment days is devoted to music and dancing.

On those days there is great stir and animation. Diamonds and jewels sparkle in the dazzling lustre of chandeliers. People are ecstatic over the resplendent toilettes of the most beautiful women in France. A perfume of elegance and aristocracy exhales from amidst the lights and flowers.

"Some choose one game and some another. Still others only desire to watch the playing, or to walk about and admire the assembly and the richness of these grand apartments. Although they are filled, one sees none but men and women of high rank. People are entirely free to converse there. . . . Respect, however, prevents them from raising their voices too high, so that the noise one hears is not disagreeable. . . . The King lays aside his grandeur in order to play with many of the assembly who have never had such an honor. He goes from one game to another. He will not allow any one to rise nor interrupt the game when he approaches."[1]

The reunion breaks up at ten o'clock, the hour when Louis XIV. takes his supper, usually *au grand couvert*, with the royal family in the room called the King's ante-chamber.[2] Here is the nave, a piece of jeweller's work in silver gilt shaped like a dismasted vessel. In it are kept the King's napkins between scented cushions. Everybody who passes in front of the nave, even the princesses, must salute it, as they do the King's bed when entering the bed-chamber.

Supper ended, Louis XIV. enters his chamber, where he receives his private family, his brother, and his children, with their husbands or wives. He chats until the couchee, which takes place toward

[1] *Mercure galant.* December, 1682.
[2] Room 121 of the *Notice du Musée.*

midnight, or one o'clock at latest. The greatest nobles strive for the honor of holding the candlestick while the sovereign undresses. As Saint-Simon remarks, it is a distinction, a favor which is counted on, so skilful is Louis XIV. in making something out of nothing.

The task of the courtiers is ended for to-day. The lights are extinguished. All subsides into darkness and silence. At last it is the hour for repose. But one sleeps little or sleeps badly in this region which La Bruyère speaks of, "which is some forty-eight degrees of elevation from the pole and more than eleven hundred leagues by sea from the Iroquois and the Hurons." Here the "joys are visible but false, and vexations hidden but real." The night's slumber is disturbed by reminiscences of yesterday, and by anxieties for to-morrow, and one forgets neither his ambitions nor his cares, because whether sleeping or waking one thinks of nothing but his own interests.

IX

THE MARQUISE DE CAYLUS

AMIDST the court of Versailles, now grown old and saddened, one sees here and there young, smiling, luminous faces, fresh and lively countenances which brighten up the palace, eyes that sparkle, gracious, intelligent, and sympathetic smiles, sweet and persuasive voices, enchanting women whose charm sheds somewhat of light and poesy over ceremonial gravities and the weariness of etiquette.

Louis XIV. loved youth. As to Madame de Maintenon, who had never had any children and who had, nevertheless, the qualities necessary to make her a good mother, she made herself amends for the cruelty of fate by watching with maternal solicitude over the children whom she cherished. It was thus she educated her niece *à la mode de Bretagne*, the pretty and graceful Mademoiselle de Murçay-Villette, a typical French woman, gay, satirical, even a trifle caustic, animated, amusing, captivating and captivated.

She merits special mention in the galaxy of Ver-

sailles, this little magician who handled the pen as well as she did the fan, this clever woman who has had the honor of being cited by Sainte-Beuve as the model of those exquisite qualities which are summed up in the word *urbanity*, this enchantress to whom Madame de Maintenon said: "You know very well how to dispense with pleasures, but pleasures cannot dispense with you."

Marguerite de Murçay-Villette, Marquise de Caylus, was born in Poitou, in the year 1673. Benjamin de Valois, Marquis de Villette, had espoused Arthémise d'Aubigné, daughter of the famous Théodore Agrippa d'Aubigné, the soldier-poet, the austere and imperious Calvinist, the haughty and satirical companion of Henry IV., Théodore Agrippa d'Aubigné, whose son was the father of Madame de Maintenon. The little de Murçay-Villette was seven years old, and her father, who was in the navy, was on duty when her aunt *à la mode de Bretagne*, Madame de Maintenon, resolved to convert her to Catholicism.

This was the moment when Louis XIV. was converting the Huguenots of his realm with their will or against it. The child was taken away from her family and conveyed to Saint-Germain.

"At first I cried a good deal," she says in her *Souvenirs*, "but the next day I found the King's Mass so beautiful that I consented to become a Catholic on condition that I should hear it every day and that no one should whip me. That is all

the controversy that was employed and the only abjuration that I made."

M. de Murçay-Villette was indignant at first, but he ended by growing milder and embracing the Catholic religion himself. As the King was congratulating him, he responded: "This is the only occasion in my life when it has not been my object to please Your Majesty."

Madame de Maintenon, who had the vocation and the aptitudes of a teacher, took pleasure in occupying herself with her niece.

"I was brought up," says the latter, "with a care for which Madame de Maintenon cannot be too much praised. Nothing happened at court without her causing me to make such reflections on it as I was capable of, approving me when I thought justly, and correcting me when I thought badly. My days were spent among masters, reading, and honest and well-regulated amusements; my memory was cultivated by obliging me to learn verses by heart, and as I was under the necessity of giving an account of my reading or of any sermon I heard, I was forced to pay attention. In addition to this I had to write a letter every day either to a member of my family or some other person whom I might choose, and this I had to take to Madame de Maintenon every evening that she might either approve or correct it, according as it was well or ill done."

At the age of thirteen Mademoiselle de Villette was already charming, and her hand was asked for

by the greatest nobles, M. de Roquelaure and M. de Boufflers. Madame de Maintenon thought she ought not to accept such brilliant offers for her niece.

"My niece is not a sufficiently good match for you," she said to M. de Boufflers. "Still, I am not insensible to the honor you pay me. I will not give her to you, but in future I shall consider you as my nephew."

The woman who used this language often displayed what may be called an ostentatious modesty. She rather gloried in making a commonplace marriage for her charming niece, and selected for her a husband devoid of merit, fortune, or command, M. de Tubières, Marquis de Caylus. The young wife was only thirteen years old. The King gave her only a moderate allowance and a collar of pearls worth ten thousand écus.

But shortly after her marriage she had an apartment at Versailles, where her beauty did not fail to excite enthusiasm. Saint-Simon, who did not admire too readily, exclaims concerning her: "Never was there a visage so intelligent, so affecting, never such grace and wit, never such gaiety and amusement, never was a creature more attractive."

The eulogies of the Abbé de Choisy are not less expressive: "Mirth and laughter beamed around her; her mind was still more amiable than her visage; . . . and if her natural gaiety had permitted her to retrench certain little airs rather too coquet-

tish, which all her innocence could not justify, she would have been a perfect person."

Madame de Caylus was one of the heroines of those representations of *Esther* which continue to be one of the most pleasing episodes of the second half of the great reign.

In 1685 Madame de Maintenon had founded at Saint-Cyr, quite close to Versailles, a house for the gratuitous education of one hundred and fifty noble but poor young girls. Religion and literature were both in high esteem there. Some of the pupils of the senior class — the blues — had declaimed *Cinna*, *Andromaque*, and *Iphigénie*, in presence of their companions. But it was soon perceived that they were but too well inclined to the business, especially for the recitation of the love scenes. Madame de Maintenon wrote to Racine: "Our little ones have just been playing your *Andromaque*, and have played it so well that they shall never play it again, nor any other of your pieces."

But though tragedy was proscribed, poetry was by no means forsaken. Madame de Maintenon, who admired Racine greatly, begged him to compose a sort of moral and historical poem for Saint-Cyr from which human love should be rigorously excluded. This was in 1688. Racine was nearly fifty, and had renounced the theatre twelve years before, being then in the plenitude of genius and inspiration. Religious scruples had driven him from the stage, and he had offered to God the most painful sacrifice

possible to an artist: that of his renown. This great poet had condemned himself to silence, and with his own hands taken the coursers from the triumphal chariot which drew him through the starry spheres of art. He trembled with joy when he saw a means of reconciling his former inclinations with the sentiments which had turned him away from them. The poet and the devotee were at last to come to terms. *Esther* was the fruit of their alliance, that exquisite work which is akin both to tragedy and elegy, that poem full of tenderness and tears which is worthy of the poet of whom his son said: "My father was a man all sentiment, all feeling." Aroused as it were from a long slumber, Racine had drawn from this repose a freshness of impressions, a new originality. "At fifteen years old," says M. Michelet, "Madame de Caylus saw the birth of *Esther*, inhaled its first perfume, and understood its spirit so well that she seemed, by the emotion of her voice, to add somewhat to it."

It was not originally intended that she should play any part in it. But one day when Racine was about to read several of the scenes to Madame de Maintenon, she began to declaim them in so moving a style that the enthusiastic poet composed a prologue, that of *Piety*, expressly for her.

The first representation was given at Saint-Cyr, January 26, 1689. The vestibule of the dormitories, situated on the second floor of the pupils' great staircase, was divided into two parts, one for the stage,

and the other for the spectators. Two amphitheatres had been erected at the side of the room, a small one for the ladies of the community, and a larger one for the pupils. The smallest children, the reds, were on the highest row of seats, then came the greens, the yellows, and at the bottom of all the oldest girls, the blues, all wearing ribbons of their class colors. The play was given in the daytime, but all the windows had been closed, and the stairways, passages, and the hall itself glittered with lights in crystal chandeliers. Between the two amphitheatres were seats for the King, Madame de Maintenon, and several spectators admitted as an exceptional favor to the honor of applauding *Esther*.

Louis XIV. arrived at three o'clock in the afternoon, and the piece began a few minutes later. Madame de Caylus recited her prologue in an affecting and melodious voice which excited a buzz of enthusiastic emotion in the noble audience. Her seventeen years, her pure tones, her tender and ideal beauty, made her seem like an angel. From the first lines of the prologue success was assured. Louis XIV. felt himself rejuvenated. Here at last was a diversion worthy of the great King. How easily one pictures to himself this half-pious, half-profane animation; these naïve and charming young girls who say a *Veni Creator* before they go on the stage; these improvised actresses who are electrified by the music, the poetry, the footlights, and, still more than all these, by the presence of him who is their

protector, their earthly Providence! The greatest of kings in the house; the greatest of poets in the greenroom; actresses who vie with each other in tenderness and grace; verses altogether noble, ideal, and harmonious; choirs whose celestial melody is the hymn of prayer, the canticle of divine love; a splendid *Mise en scène;* admirable decorations; Persian costumes glittering with the crown jewels, and, still more alluring than even the prestige of the throne and the beams of the royal sun, the charm of youth, the freshness of imaginations, the sweet and penetrating poetry of the souls of young girls, — what a spectacle, what an intoxication! *Esther* is played by Mademoiselle de Veilhan, *Élise* by Mademoiselle de Maisonfort, *Assuérus* by Mademoiselle Lastic, *Aman* by Mademoiselle d'Abancourt, *Zarès* by Mademoiselle de Marsilly, *Hydaspe* by Mademoiselle de Mornay. The rôle of *Mardochée* is played to perfection by Mademoiselle de Glapion, that young person who caused Racine to say: "I have found a *Mardochée* whose voice goes to one's very heart."

The poet is behind the scenes acting as stage manager. Mademoiselle de Maisonfort, who is frightened, has had a momentary failure of memory. When she returns to the greenroom, he says to her: "Ah! Mademoiselle, here is a piece spoiled." The beautiful young girl at once begins to cry; Racine consoles her and pulling out his handkerchief wipes her eyes, as one would do for an infant. She returns to the stage and plays like a finished actress. Her

eyes are somewhat red still, and Louis XIV., whom nothing escapes, whispers: "The little canoness has been crying."

Madame de Maintenon can hardly conceal her joy at the success of her dear children. Louis XIV., touched and enraptured, grants his approbation, the most precious of rewards, to the poet and the actresses, and when the representation is ended, Racine, "who loves God as he formerly loved his mistresses,"[1] hastens to the chapel and falls on his knees in a transport of gratitude.

The succeeding representations are still more brilliant than the first. Madame de Caylus takes the part of *Esther* and surpasses herself in it. A childish divertisement, as Racine said himself, attracts the eager attention of the whole court. The favor of an invitation is more desired and more difficult to obtain than that of a journey to Marly. Louis XIV. enters first, and stands at the threshold, cane in hand, until all the guests are in the hall. Madame de Sévigné, who is admitted to the representation of February 19, 1689, cannot contain her joy. She sits next to Marshal de Bellefonds, to whom she communicates her enthusiastic impressions in an undertone. The marshal rises between the acts and goes to tell the King how pleased he is. "I am near a lady," he adds, "who is very worthy of having seen *Esther*."

[1] Madame de Sévigné, Letter of February 7, 1689.

At the close of the performance Louis XIV. addresses a few words to several of the spectators. He stops in front of Madame de Sévigné and speaks kindly to her.

The Marquise, quite proud of such an honor, has mentioned this conversation in one of her letters: "The King said to me, 'Madame, I am sure you have been pleased. Racine has a great deal of genius.' Without showing surprise I answer, 'Sire, he has a great deal; but, truly, these young people have a great deal also; they enter into the subject as if they had never done anything else.' 'Ah! as for that, it is true.' — And then His Majesty moved away, leaving me the object of envy."

Is not that last word characteristic? The most superior woman in the kingdom is beside herself with joy because the King has spoken with her. What a prestige had this incomparable monarch, the least mark of attention from whom made the whole court envious!

The success of *Esther* had been too great. Criticism, motived either by piety or jealousy, soon began to attack these representations which had been so brilliant. The genius of the poet and the talent of the actresses had to be recognized of course, whether willingly or unwillingly. The criticism was aimed at other points. It was said that this blending of the cloister and the theatre was not a good thing, that the self-love, and perhaps even the coquettish instincts of the young girls, would be over-excited

by such divertisements. Bourdaloue and Bossuet had been present at the representations as if to mark their approval in that manner. But Madame de Maintenon's new director, Godez-Desmaretz, Bishop of Chartres, decided against these ostentatious exhibitions of the pupils of Saint-Cyr. Hence they were put an end to, and *Athalie*, which had been called for after the success of *Esther*, and already learned by the young ladies of Saint-Cyr, was given, in 1690, without display, without scenes, decorations, or costumes, in the blue class-room, with only the King, Madame de Maintenon, and some dozen others as spectators.

The representations of *Esther* were not all that was considered too worldly. The young woman who had been so much admired in it, Madame de Caylus, did not remain long in favor at court. Her wit and gaiety, the freedom of her manners and speech, were too excessive not to entail disgrace. This witty and charming Marquise, who was not yet twenty, was devout at her prayers. Like the majority of exceptionally intelligent women, like the Longuevilles, the Montespans, the Sévignés, she was divided between God and the world. But, unfortunately, the world got much the larger share. With Madame de Caylus pleasures took precedence over prayers. Her mobile, caustic, somewhat superficial character did not incline to the austerities of a profound devotion.

There was the stuff for a great actress in her

rather than a vocation to religion, and when she saw the court assuming the manners of the cloister she found herself a trifle out of place. Married to a man of no merit, who was always with his regiment, on campaigns or at the frontier, she easily consoled herself for his absence, and contracted a liaison with the Duke de Villeroy, which made a scandal. Fond of gossip, if not of calumny, not afraid to provoke enmity for the sake of a witty speech, accustomed to the society and the mischievous pranks of the Duchess de Bourbon, who, with less wit, had all the satiric tendencies of her mother, Madame de Montespan, Madame de Caylus was inclined to scoff at everything. That was a sort of pastime which Louis XIV. knew not how to pardon. This audacious young person had been imprudent enough to say, in speaking of the court: "This place is so dull that it is like an exile to live here."

The King took her at her word, and forbade her to appear again in the place she found so tiresome. She seemed to him affected and coquettish. He thought her too keen, too acute, too ready to use that weapon of ridicule which is so deadly when wielded by the little hand of a pretty woman. He was even of the opinion that this futile education did not greatly redound to the credit of Madame de Maintenon, who on her part had no interest in keeping near the King a young woman who might injure Saint-Cyr. Hence the disgrace of Madame

de Caylus was of long duration. She remained away from the court for thirteen years as a sort of penance, and only obtained forgiveness through good behavior, submission, and piety. But the pardon was complete.

She reappeared at Versailles, February 10, 1707, at the King's supper, and received a cordial welcome. She was only thirty-three, had been a widow for about two years, and did not intend to marry again. Beautiful as an angel and more charming than ever, she entirely regained the favor of Madame de Maintenon, whose assiduous companion she became, and remained at the palace until the death of Louis XIV. After that she returned to Paris, where she occupied a small house contiguous to the Luxembourg gardens. There she gave suppers to great nobles and men of learning, and her salon was an intellectual centre, where the traditions of the seventeenth century were perpetuated into the first years of the eighteenth. There she died in 1729, aged only fifty-six.

Some months earlier she had written, under the modest title of *Souvenirs*, the brief and witty memoirs which will make her name immortal. Her friends, enchanted by her lively wit, had long entreated her to write out, not for the public, but for them, the anecdotes which she related so well. In the end she acquiesced, and committed to paper certain incidents, certain portraits. What a treasure are these *Souvenirs*, so fluently written, so unpretentious, with neither dates nor chronological order, but upon which all his-

torians have drawn for more than a century![1] How much is contained in this little book, which teaches more in a few lines than interminable works in many volumes! How feminine it is, and how French! One readily understands Voltaire's liking for these charming *Souvenirs*. Who ever applied better than Madame de Caylus the famous precept: "Go lightly, mortals; don't bear on too hard"?

She belonged to that race of spontaneous writers who produce artistic works without knowing it, just as M. Jourdain wrote prose, and who do not even suspect that they possess that chief attribute of style: naturalness. What pure, what ready, wit! What good humor, what unconstraint, what delightful ease! What a charming series of portraits, each more life-like, more animated, still better than all the others! These little miniatures due to the brush of a woman of the world are better worth studying than many a picture or fresco.

[1] The *Souvenirs de Madame de Caylus*, which were never completed, remained in manuscript during her life and long after her death. They were first printed at Amsterdam, in 1770, with a preface and notes attributed to Voltaire.

X

MADAME DE MAINTENON AND THE GENTLEWOMEN OF SAINT-CYR

THE figure of Madame de Maintenon is framed in the house of Saint-Cyr like that of Mademoiselle de La Vallière in the Carmelite convent of rue Saint-Jacques. We see the spouse of Louis XIV. in her true light when she is surrounded by the nuns and the pupils of an asylum where the idea of religion is blended with that of nobility, and which makes room for both earth and heaven, for the world and for God. Saint-Cyr is the veritable offspring of this wife who was not a mother; it is here that a heart far less barren, less egotistic than is believed, expends what remains to her of emotional strength and tenderness.

In this pious abode Madame de Maintenon experiences the charm of compassion, edification, melancholy. From this point she contemplates, through the mists of the past, her own eventful and astonishing career. Here she listens with emotion to the remote echo of the stormy floods which beat against her cradle, troubled her youth, and which even now

often disturb her age. When she sees so many dowerless young girls, she recalls the time when she was poor and forsaken in spite of her illustrious birth. She reflects on what intelligence, ability, and courage the grand-daughter of Théodore Agrippa d'Aubigné needed in order to struggle against poverty. She remembers the snares laid for her by the spirit of evil, the illusions of the girl and the young woman, from which her lofty intelligence and good sense preserved her; she summarizes the lessons suggested by her experience. In this chapel whose silence is undisturbed by the worldly murmur of courtiers, more occupied with the King than with God, she reflects on all the intrigues, vanities, and deceptions of the court. In this calm abode, where monastic gravity is softened by the graces of childhood and youth, she reflects on the morning of life and its evening, on the cradle and the grave. For Madame de Maintenon there is a sort of living antithesis between Versailles and Saint-Cyr: Versailles is agitation, Saint-Cyr repose. Versailles is the world with its torments, follies, and ambitions; Saint-Cyr is the vestibule of heaven. Hence, how greatly she prefers her beloved convent to the marble court, the apartments of the King, the Gallery of Mirrors, the splendors of the finest palace of the universe!

"Long live Saint-Cyr!" she exclaims; "long live Saint-Cyr! In spite of its defects one is better off there than in any other place in the world. . . .

When Saint-Cyr is in question, I am always delighted." She is quieted and consoled when she enters her dear asylum. "When I see the door close after me on entering this solitude whence I never depart without pain, I am full of joy." And when she returns to Versailles, she feels a contraction of the heart, a kind of anguish.

"I experience," she says again, "a sentiment of horror at the sight of Versailles; what is called the world is there; it is its centre; there all the passions are in action: interest, ambition, envy, and pleasure."

Madame de Maintenon's preference for Saint-Cyr, which is her work, her creation, the very symbol of her thought, is, moreover, very easily explained. It is there, in fact, that her character, with its love of domination, her high intelligence, her talent for writing and speaking, her aptitude for government, are manifested. It must be owned that it is not religion alone which makes her prefer the convent to the palace. At Versailles she is constrained, incommoded, she obeys; the rays of the royal sun, though paler than they were, have still a prestige and a brilliancy which intimidate her. At Saint-Cyr she is free, she commands and governs. Like Cæsar, who said he would prefer to be the chief in a village than the second in Rome, Madame de Maintenon finds it pleasanter to be the superior of nuns than to be the companion of a king. At Versailles she possibly regrets the crown and the ermine mantle which are lacking to her. She has no need of them

at Saint-Cyr, for there her sovereignty is uncontested. Her lightest words are accepted as oracles. Her letters, read with respectful emotion in presence of the whole community, are universally admired. The inmates or the pupils to whom they are addressed boast of them as titles of glory. Madame de Maintenon is almost the queen of France. She is absolutely queen of Saint-Cyr.

The educational house of Saint-Cyr, which was opened August 2, 1686, contained two hundred and fifty young girls of noble birth who had no fortunes. During thirty years this religious establishment was Madame de Maintenon's principal occupation. She went there every other day at least, arriving sometimes by six o'clock in the morning, going from class to class, combing and dressing the little girls, edifying and instructing the larger ones, and preferring her rôle as teacher to all the amusements and splendors of Versailles. Nothing that related to Saint-Cyr seemed to her troublesome or disagreeable. "Our ladies," said she, "are children who will not be able for a long while to rule others; I offer myself to serve them: I shall have no difficulty in being their steward, their woman of business, and with all my heart their servant, providing that my cares put them in a condition to dispense with me."

The ladies of Saint Louis, as the inmates of the establishment of Saint-Cyr were called, had an hour's recreation in the middle of the day, which they usually spent around a large table, conversing freely

while employed in needlework. Madame de Maintenon loved to come to these recreations. She brought her work, and indulged in those familiar talks of hers, at once so witty and so edifying, whose instructive charm was so well appreciated by the community.

In September, 1686, the King, after recovering from an illness, went to visit Saint-Cyr. The ladies chanted the *Te Deum*, the *Domine salvum fac regem*, and Lulli's hymn: *Grand Dieu, Sauvez le roi, Vengez le roi*, the air of which has been borrowed from France by the English for their *God save the King.* Louis XIV. was pleased with these fresh faces, these hearts filled with grateful emotion. When he returned to his carriage, he said kindly to Madame de Maintenon: "I thank you, Madame, for all the pleasure you have given me."

In 1689 he said to the ladies of Saint Louis: "I am not eloquent enough to exhort you very well; but I hope that by dint of repeating to you the motives of this foundation, I shall convince and persuade you to be always faithful to it. I will spare neither my visits nor my words, little calculated as I think them to produce this beautiful result."

"What should give pleasure to Your Majesty," replied Madame de Maintenon, "is that most of the young persons who will leave here will live and die in innocence, and that a number of them will consecrate their whole lives to God."

"Ah!" said the King, "if I could only give as

many such to God as I have torn from Him by my bad example!"

For Louis XIV. Saint-Cyr was a consolation and an expiation, a patriotic and religious work, a homage to God and to France. "What pleases me in the ladies of Saint-Cyr," said he, "is that they love the State although they hate the world: they are good sisters and good Frenchwomen."

In order to gain the blessing of heaven on his arms he recommended himself to the angels of Saint-Cyr at the beginning of every campaign, thinking that their prayers must be powerful in paradise. On returning from the siege of Mons, in April, 1691, he repaired to the holy asylum where his soul found repose from the emotions of politics and war. One of the young girls reproached him for having exposed himself too much during the siege. "I did nothing but what I ought," he returned. — "But the welfare of the State," said she, "depends on the preservation of your person." — "Places like mine," replied the King, "never remain empty: some one else would fill it better than I."

As to Madame de Maintenon, her devotion to Saint-Cyr amounted to enthusiasm. "Sanctify your house," said she to the ladies of Saint Louis, "and through your house the whole kingdom. I would give my blood to be able to communicate the education of Saint-Cyr to all religious houses which bring up young girls. In comparison with Saint-Cyr everything else is foreign to me, and my nearest relatives

are less dear to me than the least one of the good daughters of the community."

She is like the queen bee. Not content with prayer, she labors. Her pen and her needle are alike active. While chatting over her embroidery, she gives veritable sermons which would not be unworthy of great preachers. She delineates in excellent style, not merely the portraits of nuns, but those of mothers of families. "I know some," she says, "who are esteemed, respected, and admired by everybody; their husbands are so charmed with them that they say with admiration, 'I find everything in my wife. She serves me as steward, manager, and governess for my children.'"

Speaking to the novices, she exclaims: "Consider that there is no one on earth so happy as a good sister, nor any one so unhappy and despicable as a bad one. To be silent, to suffer, not to make others suffer, to love God with a heart filled with all He desires that we should love, to endure the imperfections of others but not our own, to be neither pleased nor discouraged with ourselves, to rely on nothing but the cross, and to yield nothing to self-love under whatever pretext of innocent consolation, — that is the kingdom of God which commences here below. You will have no happiness save in yielding yourselves unreservedly to God and in bearing the yoke of religion with a simple courage which will make it light and easy."

These young girls whose hearts are so innocent,

whose voices so fresh and pure, these melodious and affecting chants, this poetry of prayer, this perfume of incense, are all entrancing to Madame de Maintenon. "Pray without ceasing," she says to the ladies of Saint Louis. "Pray while you are walking, writing, spinning, working. . . . Some time ago I saw our demoiselles folding the linen with an activity which left them no leisure to think or to feel dull. They were silent for a moment, and then they began to sing hymns. I admired the innocence of their life and your happiness in averting so many sins by restraining so great a number of young persons at so dangerous an age."

In growing old, Madame de Maintenon has become austere. "Flee from men," she says, "as from your mortal enemies. Never be alone with them. Take no pleasure in hearing that you are pretty, amiable, or have a fine voice. The world is a malignant deceiver which seldom means what it says; and the majority of men who say such things as these to girls do it, hoping to find some means of ruining them."

Satiated and disillusioned by earthly vanities, she wishes to inspire others with her disgust for human grandeurs. She says to the pupils of Saint-Cyr, with the accent of conviction: "Princes and princesses are seldom contented anywhere, and are tired of everything. They never find pleasures, because they are always seeking them; they go from palace to palace, to Meudon, to Marly, to Rambouillet, to Fontainebleau, with the intention of diverting them-

selves. These are admirable places which it would enchant you to see; but they are dull there because one grows accustomed to everything, and in the long run, the most beautiful things become indifferent, and cease to give pleasure. Besides, it is not such things as these which can make us happy. Our happiness can come only from within."

When she speaks to these young gentlewomen of marriage, it is invariably with a sort of sad repugnance. M. Lavallée has made a very judicious reflection on this subject. "This," he says, "doubtless arose from the two *extraordinary* marriages she had made. If at twenty she had married a young man whom she loved and by whom she had had children, it is probable that she would have thought and spoken otherwise."

As one of the ladies of Saint-Cyr has said, Madame de Maintenon's discourses were "lively, simple, natural, intelligent, insinuating, and persuasive." She analyzed herself with the same impartiality with which she judged the qualities and the defects of her neighbor. Her talks were like a perpetual examination of conscience, a continuous meditation, a demonstration of the inanity and nothingness of human grandeurs by a woman who knew them the most thoroughly.

Austere and admirable instructions! But were all the young girls in a condition to understand them? We fancy that more than one of them is only half convinced. Perhaps there are some who say that,

after all, Madame de Maintenon was not always so scornful of the world; that she loved it well enough to prefer Scarron to a convent, and that she, more than any other woman, has been flattered by distinctions and eulogies; that in her youth she was proud enough of her successes in the brilliant salons of the hôtel d'Albret or the hôtel de Richelieu. Among the gentlewomen of Saint-Cyr there are doubtless, at the side of real saints, some young girls of ardent imaginations whom the dread of storms does not disgust with the ocean, and who, in despite of Madame de Maintenon's sage counsels, dream of trusting themselves to its waves in a bark decked with festoons and flowers. We are seldom impressed by the experience of others. It is our own disappointments, our own sufferings, that interest us. Madame de Maintenon is well aware of this, and yet it does not deter her from her pious exhortations. "Why cannot I unveil my heart to all sisters," she cries, "so that they might feel the whole worth of their vocation! What would I not give to make them see as fully as I do the pleasures by which we seek to shorten the dream of life!" In recapitulating her entire career, this chosen woman, whose mind is so observing, so practical, and judicious, arrives at conclusions which are all on the side of virtue, religion, and God; and the sacred asylum where she has already designated her place of burial inspires her with none but sound thoughts and salutary reflections.

XI

THE DUCHESS OF ORLEANS

(The Princess Palatine)

ONE of the causes which made Madame de Maintenon prefer Saint-Cyr to Versailles, was that she believed herself to be loved at Saint-Cyr, while at Versailles she felt the shafts of malevolence and hatred pierce her through an apparent deference and obsequious protestations of devotion and respect. Certain persons who saw her continually and manifested the greatest regard for her, detested her cordially, and her profound knowledge of the human heart made her always aware of it. Chief among these secret antipathies existing in a latent condition against Madame de Maintenon, must be reckoned the violent and relentless enmity of the Princess Palatine, the second wife of the Duke of Orleans.

The accusations brought against the wife of Louis XIV. by this implacable German woman are so exaggerated and unlikely that on the whole they redound to the credit of her at whom they were aimed. The Amsterdam libels, the Protestant pamphlets, never invented such enormities. They are a

torrent of insults, an orgy of hatred, the slang of Billingsgate in the finest palace of the world. They are calumnies which stop at nothing. If one were to believe the Princess Palatine, "this nasty old thing, this wicked devil, this filthy, shrivelled-up old Maintenon" would be a go-between, a procuress, a poisoner, a Locusta.

The woman who gave herself up to such furious diatribes in her correspondence is assuredly one of the most singular figures in the feminine gallery of Versailles. Her physique, her mind, her style, her character, all bear a stamp that is unique. Resembling no one else and contrasting strongly with all who surround her, she serves as a kind of set-off to the fine and delicate beauties of her time. To our mind, no woman has shown herself more fully in her letters than the Princess Palatine. She is all there with her defects and her qualities, her curious mixture of austere morals and cynical language, the haughty ways of a great lady and the expressions of a woman of the people, her pretended disdain for human grandeurs, and her fierce passion for the prerogatives of her rank.

This is the Princess whose portrait has been so truthfully painted by Saint-Simon: frank and upright, good and beneficent, grand in all her manners, and little to the last degree in all that concerns what she thinks her due. A woman of masculine bearing, not coquettish, not desirous to please, honest in her morals but shameless in her speech, somewhat rigid

and martial in her character and tastes, loving dogs, horses, and the chase, hard to herself, her own doctor in case she is a trifle indisposed, able to walk two full leagues. It is not poetical, sentimental, dreamy Germany which her very original type represents so exactly, but Germany under its rustic, almost savage aspects, its energy and rudeness, its antiquated prejudices, its amalgam of simplicity and arrogance, of credulity and pride.

The letters of the Princess Palatine lose much of their savor when translated into French. It is only in German that they have that smack of terror, that impulsiveness, that tone now cynical, now burlesque, which is their chief merit. Exaggerated and passionate as they are, they are worth consulting, even after the Memoirs of the Duke de Saint-Simon. Doubtless, Madame has none of the genius of this French Tacitus. But there is more than one analogy in their styles and their destinies. They are both of them essentially doubtful witnesses, for each was biassed and could not judge impartially in cases which nearly concerned their spites and prejudices. But neither of them even sought to hide his or her partiality.

Hence nothing is easier than to find the truth which underlies their falsehoods. If she has not the genius of Saint-Simon, Madame has his wrath and indignation and his hatreds. Like him, she is obliged to receive her enemies well, to put continual constraint on herself, to live with the bastards whom she

execrates, to salute the morganatic queen whom she has a horror of. She is an honest woman as he is an honest man. She loves right, justice, and truth as he does. Like him, she writes in secret and consoles herself for a perpetual constraint by exaggerating the liberty of style. Like him, she wreaks her vengeance by means of pen and ink. It is from her curious letters that we shall try to describe her character.

Daughter of the Elector Palatine Charles-Louis and of the Princess Charlotte of Hesse-Cassel, the second wife of the Duke of Orleans was born at the castle of Heidelberg. As a child she preferred guns to dolls, and thus displayed already the masculine aspects of her character. She was nineteen years old when her marriage with the brother of Louis XIV. was decided on.

She set out for France in 1671. Three bishops were sent to the frontier to instruct her in the Catholic religion, which was henceforth to be her own. The three prelates began their work at Metz and terminated it on their arrival at Versailles. The Princess, who possibly regretted her Protestantism somewhat, said she had never found her instructors in perfect accord with each other, and that she had taken a little of their doctrines from all three.

The new Duchess of Orleans was the opposite in all respects of her over whom Bossuet had preached so touching a funeral sermon. The court which had admired the very type of elegance and beauty in the

first Madame, found in the second that of rudeness and ugliness. The one was as coquettish as the other was lacking in the wish to please. The Princess Palatine took a sort of delight in exaggerating what she thought of her own physique. "I have big hanging cheeks and a large face," she wrote; "moreover, my figure is very small, short, and thick; sum total, I am an ugly little creature. If I had not a good heart, no one could put up with me anywhere, To know whether my eyes display intelligence it would be necessary to examine them with a microscope or with glasses; otherwise it would be difficult to judge. Probably no such villanous hands as mine could be found anywhere on earth. The King remarked as much to me and made me laugh heartily; for never having been able to flatter myself conscientiously on having anything pretty about me, I have adopted the plan of being the first to laugh at my ugliness, and it has succeeded very well."

If the Princess Palatine did not dazzle the court, the court on the other hand did not dazzle her. Versailles and its splendors left her unmoved. "I like better," she wrote, "to see trees and fields than the finest palaces; I like a kitchen garden better than gardens adorned with statues and fountains; a streamlet pleases me more than sumptuous cascades; in a word, all that is natural is infinitely more to my taste than works of art and magnificence; they please only at the first glance, and as soon as one is accustomed to them they create fatigue, and one

cares about them no longer." What Madame loved and regretted was her German Rhine, the hills where as a child she had seen the sun rise, and had eaten bread and cherries.

The youthful nobility of France, in spite of its elegance, luxury, and animation, had no attraction for her. "All the young people in general," said she, "are horribly debauched and addicted to every vice, not excepting lying and deceit. They consider it a shame to pique themselves on being men of honor. They do nothing but drink, wallow in debauchery, and talk obscenely. You can easily judge from this what great pleasure honest people must enjoy here; but I am afraid that if I carry my details concerning the court any farther, I shall cause you the same disgust that I often experience myself, and that this disgust may end by becoming a contagious disease."

Madame's husband was not a consolation to her, because, criticising him with legitimate severity, she did not profess more than a moderate esteem and affection for him. She never forgave him for surrounding himself with men accused of having assassinated his first wife, the beautiful and poetic Henrietta of England, and, showing the greatest contempt for the Chevalier de Lorraine, she did not feel in safety herself. She suffered from the character of her husband, feeble, timid, governed by favorites, and often misled by them: "annoying and incapable of keeping any secret, suspicious, mistrustful, sowing discords in his court for the sake of

confusion to find out something, and often also to amaze himself."

For the Princess Palatine religion was an insufficient solace for the annoyances and vexations of which she was incessantly the victim. Born in the Protestant religion, she did not well comprehend the mystic and sacred joys of Catholic worship. Although she was not a free thinker, she made occasional reflections and waggeries which seem to forebode the philosophers of the following century. She remained a good, practical Christian, but she did not consider all priests to be in the odor of sanctity. She had a horror of mixing religion with politics, and the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, which was admired by the clergy, shocked all her sentiments and instincts. "I must confess," she wrote, "that when I hear the eulogies that are given the great man from the pulpit for having persecuted the reformed, it always annoys me. I cannot endure to hear people praise what is bad." "It is inconceivable," she wrote again, "how simple the great man is in matters of religion, because he is not so in other things. That comes from his never having studied religious things, never having read the Bible, and honestly believing what is told him on this subject."

The grandeur of Bossuet's ideas, the majesty of a policy derived from the Scriptures, had few attractions for Madame. "I cannot endure," wrote she, "kings who imagine they please God by praying. It was not for that He placed them on the throne.

To do good, exercise right and justice, restrain the clergy and make them keep to their prayers without meddling in other things, — that is what ought to be the true devotion of kings. Let a king say his prayers morning and night, that is sufficient; for the rest, he ought to think of making his subjects as happy as he can."[1] Whatever bore the slightest resemblance to religious persecution aroused an energetic protest in the Princess Palatine. She found it deplorable that no one could make Louis XIV. understand that "religion was instituted rather to preserve union among men than to make them torment and persecute each other." "King James," she added, "said that our Lord Jesus Christ had certainly been seen beating men to drive them from the Temple, but He was nowhere found maltreating them to make them enter it."[2]

The theological discussions which occupied so much space at court, did not awaken the slightest interest in the Princess. On this head she writes: "All they tell us about the other world is incomprehensible. It seems to me impossible to comprehend what God does with us, and that we ought to confine ourselves to admiring His omnipotence without desiring to argue about His goodness and justice." The beautiful and touching ceremonies of Catholicism, the long sermons, the protracted offices, did not greatly please Madame. "I think,"

[1] Letter of March 23, 1696.

[2] Letter of July 18, 1700.

she writes, "that Monsieur is a devotee, and that he resembles Henry III. in every way. If this is the road to heaven, I shall certainly never enter it, seeing that I find it impossible to hear a high mass. I get through with my devotions very expeditiously, for I have a chaplain who hurries through his mass in a quarter of an hour, which just suits me." In plain chant she detested what she described as an eternal naming of the vowels; and, referring to it, she said: "Very often, if I dared, I would run out of the church, so insupportable is this to me. . . . I like Doctor Luther for having composed some fine hymns, and I am persuaded that it has given many people the notion of becoming Lutherans, for those hymns have something gay about them."

Madame, who was very observant, analyzed and described the various kinds of piety exhibited by the courtiers. "In matters of devotion, I see that every one follows his inclination; those who like to babble want to pray a good deal; those who are generous by nature always give alms; those who are choleric and easily annoyed are constantly in transports and want to kill everybody; those, on the other hand, who are gay, think they can serve God very well by rejoicing in all things and being annoyed by nothing. In short, devotion is, for those addicted to it, a touchstone which discovers their natural inclinations. For my part, I think the worst devotees are the ambitious ones who simulate devotion

in order to rule, and who claim to render a great service to God by subjecting everything to their power. The most supportable are those who, having been very amorous, when they once take God for their object, think of nothing but speaking to Him affectionately, and leave everybody else at peace." [1]

What shocked Madame was not religion, which she respected, but the hypocrites who used it as a mask. Her indignation was not directed against the faith, but against the rising flood of scepticism, and we credit her with sincere grief when she wrote in 1699: "The faith is so extinct in this country that one hardly finds a single young man who does not wish to be an atheist; but what is stranger still is that the same individual who turns atheist at Paris plays the devotee at court. It is claimed also that all the suicides which have been so frequent lately are caused by atheism."

With such an opinion of the courtiers, it is easy to understand how badly off the Princess Palatine must have found herself among them. German to the end of her finger-nails, she suffered when obliged to live beside the enemies of her country, and the conflagrations of the Palatinate seemed to her infernal flames. This court which played and danced while the palaces and cabins of Germany were burning, became to her an object of horror. The unhappy people who

[1] Letter of July 7, 1695.

were expelled from their homes, robbed, despoiled, maltreated; the ruins of Heidelberg, Manheim, Anderdach, Baden, Rastadt, Spire, Worms, were constantly in her mind. Pursued as by phantoms, she was a prey to patriotic despair and anguish, and felt herself a prisoner in the splendid palace of Versailles. There is something touching in her plaints: "Were it to save my life it is impossible for me not to regret being, so to say, the pretext for the ruin of my country. I cannot look on coolly while they destroy at a single blow in that poor Manheim all that cost the late Prince Elector, my father, so much toil and trouble. Yes, when I think of all that has been ruined there, it fills me with such horror that every night as soon as I begin to fall asleep I seem to be at Heidelberg or Manheim beholding the ravages that have been committed. Then I start up wide awake, and it takes me more than two hours to go to sleep again. I fancy how it all was in my time and to what condition it has been reduced to-day; I consider also in what condition I am myself, and I cannot avoid weeping bitter tears." [1]

The Princess found few with whom she sympathized in this large and brilliant court. She admired neither the men, the women, nor the things that figured there. Everything displeased and annoyed her. The figure of the King, whom she somewhat ironically called the great man, was the only one that seemed to her

[1] Letter of March 20, 1689.

majestic, and even on that sun she discovered many spots. Her family afforded her no satisfaction. She had the sorriest opinion of her husband, who was incessantly occupied with futilities, masquerades, and cynical intrigues. One of her letters, written in 1696, contains this curious passage: "Monsieur says openly, and he had not concealed it from either his daughter or me, that as he is beginning to grow old he has no time to lose, that he will do everything and spare nothing to amuse himself up to the last, that those who survive him will know how to spend their time after their own fashion, but that he loves himself better than me or his children, and that in consequence he intends, so long as he lives, to attend to no one but himself, and he acts as he talks."

Madame was not more happy in her son, the future regent, than in her husband. The judgment she passed on this son, who wilfully spoiled the fine qualities he had been endowed with by nature, justifies that of Louis XIV. on this boaster of vices, "*fanfaron de vices*." "Although his inclinations are in reality serious," she writes, "and he does not take kindly to debauchery, he yields to it solely to imitate others, and that is what annoys me most of all. If the pleasure were in his nature, I should not have much to say against it; but that he should do violence to himself in order to take to vice and talk twaddle, while at the same time he hides everything that is good in him — this is what I cannot endure without pain."

The Princess Palatine had a horror of illegitimate births, and her pride was outraged by the rank occupied at court by the daughters of Louis XIV. and Madame de Montespan, whom she detested, to use her own expressions, as being "the bastards of a double adultery, the children of the worst and most abandoned woman that the earth can bear." Hence, when her son consented to marry one of these bastards, she was so enraged as to give him, in the gallery of Versailles, that vigorous and resounding slap in the face, which re-echoes so plainly in Saint-Simon's Memoirs. She wrote in 1700: "My son has caused me much grief in addition to his marriage. . . . What I find worst in his conduct is that I am the only one who cannot have his friendship, for with that exception he is good to everybody. And yet I have only lost his friendship by always advising him in his own interest. At present I have taken my stand; I say nothing more to him, and speak to him as I would to the first comer of indifferent things; but it is a very painful thing not to be able to open one's heart to those one loves."

Inwardly tormented, exasperated by her husband's favorites, saddened as a wife, a mother, and a German, Madame cared little for the splendors of Versailles and Saint-Cloud, where her existence was a blending of luxury and poverty. "Certainly," said she, "I would attach great value to grandeur if one could have all that should accompany it, plenty of gold, for instance, in order to be magnificent, and the

power to assist the good and punish the wicked; but to have only the name of grandeur without the money, to be reduced to the strictest necessaries, to live under perpetual constraint without its being possible to have any society, this seems to me, in truth, perfectly insipid, and I care nothing whatever about it. I should prize more a condition in which one could amuse one's self with good friends without the troubles of grandeur, and do with one's property whatever one pleased." [1]

How did the Princess Palatine continue to divert herself from so many worries and cares? By hunting and writing. The chase, and still more the epistolary style, — these were her two passions, her two manias. From 1671, the year of her marriage, to 1722, the year of her death, she never stopped writing letters to the members of her German family. On Mondays she wrote to Savoy, on Wednesdays to Modena, Thursdays and Sundays to Hanover. But this rage for scribbling was fatal to her notwithstanding. Her correspondence, opened at the post-office, was sent to Madame de Maintenon, who showed the imprudent Princess a letter full of the most outrageous insults. "One can fancy," says Saint-Simon, "whether at this aspect and this reading Madame did not think of dying on the spot. She began to cry, and Madame de Maintenon to represent modestly to her the enormity of every part of this letter, and in a foreign

[1] Letter of August 21, 1695.

country, too. The best excuse for Madame was to own up what she could not deny, pardons, repentances, prayers, promises. . . ."

Madame de Maintenon coldly enjoyed her triumph for some time, letting the Princess choke over her words, weep, and try to take her hands. It was a terrible humiliation for so arrogant and proud a German. Nothing more is needed to explain the hatred of the Princess Palatine for her to whom in her rage she applied the old German proverb: "Where the devil cannot go himself he sends an old woman."

Madame quieted down when she became a widow in 1701. "No convent," said she the day after Monsieur died; "let no one talk to me about a convent!" Happy to remain at court, in spite of the ill things she had said about it, she softened towards Madame de Maintenon sufficiently to write in 1712: "Although the old woman is our most cruel enemy, still I wish her a long life, for everything would go ten times worse than it does if the King were to die now. He has loved this woman so much that he certainly would not survive her; therefore I hope she may live for many years."

Madame ended her days like a good Christian, and Massillon, in a beautiful funeral oration, rendered due homage to the courage she had displayed in her last sufferings. To those who surrounded her deathbed she had said with a calmness worthy of Louis XIV.: "We shall meet again in heaven."

To sum up, Madame the Duchess of Orleans is a

very strange type, but she demands attention whether or no. In her, uprightness and good sense, justice and humanity, coexist with great caprices. In her letters, amidst a mass of insignificant details, more or less inexact, anecdotes, commonplaces, and worldly gossip, there are thoughts worthy of a moralist and judgments that bear the stamp of wisdom. It is true she preached morality in cynical language; but if she speaks of debauchery, it is only to stigmatize it and depict its shamefulness. She has at least the merit of seeing vice as it is, of looking it in the face, of detesting it with a warlike, aggressive, irreconcilable hatred, of stigmatizing it in Rabelaisian accents, whose triviality renders them more striking than fine homilies. For that matter, are not crudities of language and audacities of expression less dangerous than certain refinements of half-mystical, half-sensual poesy which, by confounding the alcove with the oratory, envelop voluptuousness in a cloud of incense?

XII

MADAME DE MAINTENON AS A POLITICAL WOMAN

TO write history with the aid of pamphlets, to accept as verities all the inventions of malevolence or hatred, to say with Beaumarchais: "Calumniate, calumniate, some trace of it will always remain," to belittle what is great, to misinterpret what is noble, to tarnish what is brilliant, — such are the tactics of the sworn enemies of our traditions and our glories, such is the pleasure of the iconoclasts who would like to efface from our annals all grandiose or majestic figures. The revolutionary school whose disciples they are has already done much harm. It has sapped the foundations of the edifice; it has aided to destroy that respect which is indispensable to well-organized societies; it has converted books into libels, criticisms into invectives, portraits into caricatures; it has conspired with that essentially false literature known as the historical novel, to travesty persons and things and spread abroad a mass of exaggerations and fables which confuse facts and ideas and reverse the conceptions of good sense and justice. One of the men whom this school holds

most in horror is Louis XIV., because he was the representative or, better, the living symbol of the principle of authority. It is tired of hearing him called the Great, like that Athenian who was weary of hearing Aristides called the Just. It has fancied it would extinguish the royal sun by breathing on it. An old potentate kept in leading strings by a bigoted and intriguing old woman, — such is the image it would delineate, the characteristics it wishes to hand down to posterity as those of him who to his last hour, his latest breath, remained what he had been throughout his life — the very type of royalty, the sovereign by excellence. To dishonor Louis XIV. in the woman whom he chose among all others as the companion of his maturity and his old age, — such has been and still is the thing aimed at by writers of this school. They have based their judgments on those of the Duchess of Orleans, the Princess Palatine whose portrait we have just essayed to trace, and on those of another equally objectionable witness, the Duke de Saint-Simon. It ought not to be forgotten that this hot-headed duke and peer, who often talked like Philinte if he always thought like Alceste, was at least frank enough to say of himself: "The stoic is a fine and noble chimera. I do not pique myself, therefore, on impartiality; I should do so in vain." It irritated him to be of no account in a government where many a man of middling abilities had secured the sovereign's favor. To be condemned to the idle existence of a courtier, to live in

ante-chambers, on staircases, in the courts and gardens of Versailles and other royal residences, vexed and displeased his vanity. He laid the blame of this on Louis XIV. at first, and afterwards on the woman whom he considered as the arbiter of all appointments. But it was only in his Memoirs, written clandestinely and kept under lock and key, that he dared give expression to his wrath. He was all respect and docility in presence of the King. After bestirring himself a good deal concerning a certain collection which had been a subject of litigation between the princesses and duchesses, he said humbly to the King that to please him he would have passed around the plate like a village church-warden. He added that Louis XIV. was, "as king and as benefactor of all dukes, despotically master of their dignities, to abase or to elevate them, to dispose of them as a thing belonging to him and absolutely in his power." He was not more haughty in the presence of her whom he characterizes in his Memoirs as a "notorious creole, the begging widow of a crippled poet." He even tried to gain her over to the interests of his ambition, and to obtain through her means a captaincy of guards. Furious at not being called to the greatest positions of State, he pleased himself with the posthumous revenge of describing Madame de Maintenon in the most odious colors. Relying on his imagination in default of other proofs, he makes of her a sort of ancient courtesan, living by debauchery in her youth and by intrigue in riper

years. What he says of her is a tissue of inaccuracies. He assigns her birth to America, while it is certain that she was born at Niort. He will scarcely admit that her father was a gentleman, while his nobility is absolutely incontestable. He accuses her of having been supported by Villars, father of the marshal, by the three Villarceaux, and by several others, while it is positive that she never received a farthing. Obliged to own that on Scarron's death she was "reduced to the charity of her parish of Saint-Eustache," he does not perceive that such an assertion concerning a woman whose beauty was celebrated throughout Paris proves in an undeniable fashion the virtue of that woman. He reproaches her with having been led astray by the counsels of Ninon de Lenclos, whereas Ninon herself says: "Madame de Maintenon was virtuous in her youth through weak-mindedness. I wanted to cure her of it, but she feared God too much."

Every day increases the fame of Saint-Simon considered as a writer. One must admire a style which recalls by turns the boldness of Bossuet, the brilliancy of La Bruyère, and the ease and freedom of Madame de Sévigné. But, on the other hand, the more one studies the court of Louis XIV., the more fully one recognizes that the famous memoirs are full of inaccuracies. In his remarkable critical study of Saint-Simon's work, the learned M. Chéruel[1]

[1] *Saint-Simon considéré comme historien de Louis XIV.* by M. Chéruel.

has already refuted in an invincible manner a great number of his errors, and M. Soulié, curator of the Museum of Versailles, is constantly discovering new ones in the course of his patient and indefatigable researches. M. Chéruel has abundant reason to say: "Saint-Simon's observation is subtle, sagacious, penetrating when it is a question of sounding the recesses of the hearts of courtiers; but it lacks breadth and grandeur. The court bounds his horizon. All that lies beyond it is vague and indeterminate for him. While granting him the perspicacity of an observer one must deny him the impartiality of a judge." To listen to him, Madame de Maintenon is the sole mistress of France, the omnipotent sultana, the *pantocrate*, as the Princess Palatine calls her in her curious jargon. He describes with many details "her incredible success, the entire confidence, the rare dependence, the almightiness, the almost universal public adoration, the ministers, the generals of the army, the royal family at her feet, every boon and every advantage through her, everything rejected without her; men, affairs, things, appointments, justice, favors, religion, everything without exception in her hands, and the King and the State her victims." Needless to say that the revolutionary school has accepted this exaggerated assertion literally. To believe it, Louis XIV. is nothing but a manikin of which Madame de Maintenon pulls the strings, a sort of crowned Géronte who lets himself be tricked like a child by a Jesuit and an old woman.

It is thus they seek to tarnish the aureole with which posterity has surrounded the most majestic of all instances of old age.

Let them say what they will, Louis XIV. always remained master, and it was he who traced the great political lines of his reign. Madame de Maintenon may have advised him, but it was he who gave the final decision. We say willingly, with M. Émile Chasles: "This intelligent woman, far from being too much listened to, was not enough so. There was in her a veritable love for the public welfare, a true sorrow in the midst of our misfortunes. To-day it is necessary to retrench much from the grandeur of her power and add a great deal to that of her soul."

It is well worthy of remark that the woman who is now accused of a mischievous meddling in everything, was reproached by the most eminent men of her time of standing too much aside. Fénelon wrote to her: "They say you take too little part in affairs. Your mind is more capable of it than you think. You are perhaps a little too distrustful of yourself, or rather you are too much afraid to enter into discussions contrary to the inclination you have for a tranquil and meditative life." That Madame de Maintenon may have influenced certain appointments does not appear doubtful, but that she alone, of her own motion, controlled the ministers, is a pure invention. We believe her to have been sincere when she wrote to Madame des Ursins: "In whatever way matters turn, I conjure you, madame, to regard me as

a person incapable of affairs, who heard them talked of too late to be skilful in them, and who hates them more than she ignores them. . . . My interference in them is not desired, and I do not desire to interfere. They are not concealed from me; but I know nothing consecutively, and am often badly informed."

Reading or working at her tapestry, while the King was working with one or another of his ministers, Madame de Maintenon never timidly hazarded a word except formally when requested. Her attitude toward Louis XIV. was that of respect, humility, and modesty. True, the King said to her: "They call the popes Your Holiness, and kings Your Majesty; you, Madame, should be called Your Solidity." But this praise did not turn the head of so prudent and reasonable a woman.

To sum up, what is the chief accusation brought against Louis XIV.? His wars, his passion for luxury, his religious fanaticism. How can this triple accusation weigh upon Madame de Maintenon? Far from urging him to war, she always desired peace ardently. "I long after peace," she wrote in 1684; "I shall never give the King any counsels prejudicial to his glory; but if he would believe me, he would be less dazzled with this éclat of victory, and would think more seriously of his salvation, but it is not my business to govern the State; I ask God daily to inspire and direct the master and make him know the truth." Unfavorable to her as he is, M. Michelet nevertheless owns that she profoundly regretted the

war of the succession in Spain. He says that "the only ones who retained good sense, old Maintenon and the sickly Beauvilliers saw with terror that they were plunging into the frightful enterprise which was going to swallow up everything. . . . Just as she allowed a written decision for the revocation of the Edict of Nantes to be extorted from her, so she yielded, she submitted for the succession."[1]

She was no fonder of luxury than of war. Living with extreme simplicity herself, she sought to deter Louis XIV. from magnificent constructions and ostentatious displays of pride. According to Mademoiselle d'Aumale, the confidant of her good works, she reproached herself on account of her modest personal expenses. She never bought a new gown until it was absolutely needed, and then said: "I am taking that away from the poor. My position has many unpleasant sides, but it procures me the pleasure of giving. And yet as it prevents me from lacking anything, and as I can never encroach upon my necessaries, all my alms are a sort of luxury, good and permissible, it is true, but devoid of merit."

Madame de Maintenon not only counted for nothing in the luxury of Louis XIV., she not merely never ceased recalling him to ideas truly Christian, but she incessantly pleaded the cause of the people whose wretchedness she pitied while she admired their resignation. Never allowing herself to be

[1] Michelet, *Louis XIV. et le duc de Bourgogne.*

elated by the incense burned at her feet as well as at those of Louis XIV., she had neither those bursts of pride, that thirst for riches, nor that eagerness for domination which one finds in the lives of nearly all favorites. She was indifferent to jewels, rich stuffs, and costly furniture. Even in her youth and amidst the infatuation excited by her beauty, her mind had been her chief adornment, and she had never been dazzled by exterior display. No prodigality is connected with her name.

The chief complaint formulated against Madame de Maintenon by certain historians is the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. They load her with anathemas as if she alone were responsible for that fatal measure. Forgetting that it was during his passion for Mademoiselle de Fontanges that Louis XIV. began to take rigorous legislative proceedings against the Protestants, they attribute the persecution to the hypocritical zeal of a narrow devotion inspired by Madame de Maintenon alone. On the contrary, the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, which we are very far from approving, was, one may say, forced on the King by public opinion. As has been remarked by M. Théophile Lavallée, those of the reformed church preserved toward the government the attitude of children in disgrace, and towards the Catholics that of disdainful enemies; they persisted in their isolation; they continued their correspondence with their friends in England and Holland.[1] "France," has

[1] M. Lavallée, *Histoire de France.*

said M. Michelet, "found a Holland in her own bosom which was rejoicing at the success of the other one."[1]

To recall the dissidents to unity was the fixed idea of Louis XIV. This, as was said at the time, would be the meritorious work and proper characteristic of his reign. The assembly of the clergy, the parliament of Toulouse, the Catholics of the south of France, had urgently solicited the revocation. When the decree appeared there was an explosion of enthusiasm. Whatever Saint-Simon may say, the court of Rome testified an extreme joy. Innocent XI. hastened to address a brief to Louis XIV. thanking him in the name of the Church. He caused the cannon of Castle Saint Angelo to be fired, and held a papal chapel at which the *Te Deum* was chanted. The Duke d'Estrées, French ambassador to the Holy See, wrote to the King: "His Holiness said to me that what Charlemagne had done was nothing in comparison to what has just been accomplished by Your Majesty, that there was nothing so great, and that no example of a similar action could be found." Chancellor Letellier, intoning the canticle of Simeon, died saying that he had nothing left to wish for after this final act of his long ministry. Bossuet rose to lyrical transports: "Delay not to publish this miracle of our own days. Pass on the story to future ages. Take up your sacred pens, ye who compose the

[1] M. Michelet, *Précis sur l'Histoire moderne.*

MADAME DE MAINTENON.

annals of the Church. . . . Touched by so many marvels, let our hearts dilate over the piety of Louis; lift even to heaven our acclamations, and say to this new Constantine, this new Theodosius, this new Charlemagne, what the six hundred and thirty Fathers said of old in the Councils of Chalcedon: 'You have consolidated the faith, you have exterminated the heretics.'"[1] Saint-Simon, who blames the revocation with so much eloquence, avows that Louis XIV. was convinced of having performed a holy action. "The monarch had never thought himself so great in the sight of men, nor so far advanced in the sight of God in the reparation of the sins and scandals of his life. He heard nothing but eulogies." The laity did not applaud him less than the clergy. Madame de Sévigné wrote, October 8, 1685: "Never has any king done nor ever will do so memorable a thing." Rollin, La Fontaine, La Bruyère, displayed as much enthusiasm as Fénelon, Massillon and Fléchier. These lines by Madame Deshoulières reflect the general impression: —

"Ah! pour sauver ton people et pour venger la foi,
Ce que tu viens de faire est au-dessus de l'homme.
De quelques grand noms qu'on te nomme,
On t'abaisse; il n'est plus d'assez grand noms pour toi."[2]

[1] Bossuet, *Oraison funèbre de Michel Letellier.*

[2] Ah! to save thy people and to avenge the faith,
What thou has just done is above the power of man.
By whatever great names they name thee,
Thou art abased; no name henceforth is great enough for thee.

Doubtless Madame de Maintenon allowed herself to be carried away by the unanimous sentiment of the Catholic world. But it was assuredly not she who took the initiative. Voltaire recognizes this when he says: "One sees by her letters that she did not urge the revocation of Nantes, but that she did not oppose it."

In a letter of September 4, 1678, she writes concerning abjurations which were insincere: "I am indignant at such conversions; the state of those who abjure without being truly Catholics is infamous." We read in the *Notes des Dames de Saint-Cyr:* Madame de Maintenon, while desiring with all her heart the reunion of the Huguenots to the Church, would have desired that it might rather be by the way of persuasion and gentleness than by severity; and she told us that the King, who was very zealous, would have liked to see her more eager than she seemed, and that he said to her on this account: "I fear, Madame, lest the consideration you wish shown to the Huguenots may be the result of some remaining bias toward your former religion."

Fénelon himself, who is represented as the apostle of tolerance, approved the principle of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. "Though no sovereign," said he, "may require interior belief in religious matters from his subjects, he may prevent the public exercise, or the profession of opinions, or ceremonies, which disturb the peace of the commonwealth, by the diversity and multiplicity of sects." Such was also

the opinion of Madame de Maintenon. But Protestant writers themselves have recognized that she blamed the employment of force. It is the historian of the French refugees in Brandenburg who says: "Let us do her justice. She never counselled the violent means that were used; she abhorred persecutions, and those that were practised were concealed from her."

Madame de Maintenon was essentially moderate, both in religion and in politics. Her counsels counted for something in the declaration of December 13, 1698, which, while maintaining the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, established a toleration which lasted until the end of the reign. Let us be on our guard, moreover, against sharing the gross error of those who behold servitude in Catholicism and liberty in Protestantism. Luther recommended the extermination of Anabaptists. Calvin executed Michael Servetus, Jacques Brunet, and Valentin Gentiles for heresy. The inhumanities of Louis XIV. toward Protestants did not equal those of William of Orange against Catholics. The English laws were of Draconian severity; any Catholic priest residing in England, who had not after three days embraced the Anglican cult, was liable to the penalty of death. And nowadays they want to persuade us that in the strife between Louis XIV. and William, it was the Protestant prince who represented the principle of religious toleration!

To sum up, whether the revocation of the Edict of

Nantes or any other act of the great reign is in question, Madame de Maintenon did not play the odious part which has been attributed to her by calumny. We do not believe she ever outstepped the limits of that legitimate influence which a devoted and intelligent woman usually exercises over her husband. If she was often mistaken, at least she was mistaken in good faith. The real Madame de Maintenon is not the mischievous, malicious, crafty, and vindictive bigot imagined by certain writers; she is a pious and reasonable woman, animated by the noblest intentions, loving France sincerely, sympathizing deeply with the sufferings of the people, detesting war, respecting right and justice, austere in her tastes, moderate in her opinions, irreproachable in her conduct.

Speaking of the accord which existed between her and the group of truly religious great nobles, M. Michelet has said: "Let us regard this little group as a convent in the midst of the court, a convent conspiring for the amelioration of the King. In general, it is the converted court. What is fine, very fine in this party, what constitutes its honorable bond, is the edifying reconciliation of mortal enemies. The Duchess de Béthune-Charost, daughter of Fouquet, the man whom Colbert imprisoned for twenty years, became the friend, almost the sister of the three daughters of her father's persecutor." Such were the sentiments which Madame de Maintenon knew how to inspire. Every morning and night she said from the depths of her soul this prayer which she had

composed: "Lord, grant me to gladden the King, to console him, to encourage him, to sadden him also when it must be for Thy glory. Cause me to hide from him nothing which he ought to know through me, and which no one else would have the courage to tell him."

No; there was nothing hypocritical in such piety, and the companion of Louis XIV. was sincere when she said to Madame de Glapion: "I should like to die before the King; I would go to God; I would cast myself at the foot of His throne; I would offer Him the desires of a soul that He would have purified; I would pray Him to grant the King greater lights, more love for his people, more knowledge of the state of the provinces, more aversion for the perfidy of the courtiers, more horror of the ways in which his authority is abused; and God would hear my prayers."

XIII

MADAME DE MAINTENON'S LETTERS

MADAME DE MAINTENON is one of those characters who require to be patiently and conscientiously studied by an observer who wishes to render an impartial judgment. At first, Louis XIV. did not like the woman destined to become the most serious and lasting affection of his life. "The King did not like me," she writes herself, "and long held me in aversion; he was afraid of me as a wit."

How was it that Louis XIV. passed from repugnance to sympathy, from distrust to confidence, from prejudice to admiration? It was by getting a nearer view of moral qualities which at first he saw only from a distance. The same thing has happened to a majority of the critics who, having to speak of Madame de Maintenon, have not been contented with superficial views, but have carefully analyzed the life and character of this celebrated woman. What has occurred to one of her principal defenders, M. Théophile Lavallée, affords a proof of the foregoing observation. When he brought out his *Histoire des Français*, this writer judged Madame de Maintenon

very severely. He accused her "of the most complete aridity of heart, of a spirit of narrow devotion and mean intrigue." He reproached her with having suggested fatal enterprises and wretched appointments to Louis XIV. "She belittled him," he says, "she forced mediocre and servile people on him, she had, in fine, the greatest share in the errors and disasters of the end of the reign."

Some years later, M. Lavallée wrote his fine *Histoire de la maison royale de Saint-Cyr*. In this work he says: "Madame de Maintenon gave Louis XIV. none but salutary and disinterested counsels, useful to the State and to the alleviation of the people." What had happened between the publication of these two books? The author had studied. Devoting a patient research to a work of prevailing interest, he had succeeded in collecting the letters and writings of Madame de Maintenon. Thanks to communications from the Dukes of Noailles, Mouchy, Cambacérès, from MM. Feuillet de Conches, Montmerqué, de Chevry, Honoré Bonhomme, he had been able to increase the treasures of the archives of Saint-Cyr.

Madame de Maintenon is one of the historical personages who have written most. Her Letters, if she had not destroyed a great number of them, would almost form a library. The archives of Saint-Cyr alone contain forty volumes of them. And yet the most curious of the Letters have doubtless not been preserved. Always prudent, Madame de Maintenon burned her correspondence with Louis XIV., her hus-

band; with Madame de Montchevreuil, her most intimate friend; with the Bishop of Chartres, her director. The letters of her youth are rare. Nobody yet divined the future which Providence was reserving for her. M. Lavallée's collection, necessarily incomplete, is nevertheless an historical monument of very great value. Two volumes of Letters and familiar discourses on the education of girls, two others of historical and edifying Letters addressed to the ladies of Saint-Cyr, four volumes of general correspondence, one of conversations and maxims, another of miscellaneous writings, and a final one which includes the *Souvenirs* of Madame de Caylus, the Memoirs of the ladies of Saint-Cyr, and those of Mademoiselle d'Aumale, form the *ensemble* of a publication that has fully illustrated a figure eminently curious to study.

The collection of Labeaumelle, Voltaire's enemy, contains, along with many authentic letters, a great quantity of apocryphal ones. There are changes, interpolations, additions, and suppressions. Fabricated bits have been inserted containing clap-trap phrases, piquant reflections, maxims in the style of the eighteenth century. M. Lavallée has found the means whereby to distinguish the wheat from the tares. Passing Labeaumelle's collection through the sieve of a sagacious criticism, he has succeeded in verifying the text of the true letters and proving the apocryphal character of those which are false. Like the connoisseurs in autographs, he suspected

the striking letters. Falsifiers are almost always imprudent. They force the note; and when they set about inventing a document, they want their invention to produce a profound impression.

The correspondence of celebrated persons is generally much more simple, far less studied than the pretended autographs attributed to them. One needs to be always on his guard against letters containing either finished portraits, profound judgments, or historical predictions. They are often signs of falsification; and the more striking they seem, the more carefully should their origin be examined. This is one of the rules whose strict application would prevent many mistakes. The majority of historical documents resemble certain inheritances. They should not be accepted unless on condition of not becoming liable to debts in excess of the assets.

Madame de Maintenon's letters deserve the trouble that has been taken to establish their dates and authenticity with exactness. Baron Walckenaër, the biographer of Madame de Sévigné, assigns to them the highest rank without hesitation. "Madame de Maintenon," he says, "is a more finished model of epistolary style than Madame de Sévigné. The latter seldom writes except when she feels the need of conversing with her daughter or other persons whom she loves, in order to say everything, to tell the whole story. Madame de Maintenon, on the contrary, has always a distinct end in view in writing. The cleverness, proportion, elegance, and justice of her

thoughts, the subtlety of her reflections, enable her to attain pleasantly the goal she aims at. Her progress is straight and unfaltering, she follows the road without striking against the bushes, without deviating to right or left." [1]

Such was also the opinion of the first Napoleon. He greatly preferred the letters of Madame de Maintenon to those of Madame de Sévigné, which were, according to him, "snow eggs, with which one could surfeit himself without overloading his stomach." In citing Napoleon's preference, M. Désiré Nisard accepts it with some reservations. "When Madame de Maintenon's letters are full of matter," says the eminent critic, "one shares the opinion of the great Emperor. They possess, to the highest degree, a certain nameless quality of discretion, simplicity, efficacity. They do not dazzle by means of feminine versatility; and the naturalness of them pleases all the more because it proceeds rather from the reason which disdains mere prettiness without desiring to dispense with real graces, than from the wit which plays with nothings. But when matter is lacking, these letters are short, dry, constrained." [2]

If Madame de Maintenon had had literary preoccupations, if she had imagined that she was writing for posterity, she would have produced letters still more remarkable. There is neither studied re-

[1] Walckenaër, *Memoires sur Madame de Sévigné, sa vie et ses écrits.*

[2] M. Désiré Nisard, *Histoire de la littérature française.*

finement nor pretension in her correspondence. She writes to edify, to convert, or to console far more than to please. Her notes to the ladies and young girls of Saint-Cyr do not outstep this pious limit. Often Madame de Maintenon does not take the pen herself, but while spinning or knitting she dictates to the young girls who act as her secretaries, to Mademoiselle de Loubert, Mademoiselle de Saint-Étienne, Mademoiselle d'Osmond, or Mademoiselle d'Aumale. But in the least of these innumerable notes are always found those qualities of style, sobriety, proportion, conciseness, perfect harmony between the thought and its expression, which have been admired by the best judges.

The two women of the seventeenth century whose letters are most celebrated, Madame de Sévigné and Madame de Maintenon, felt for each other both sympathy and esteem: "We take supper every evening with Madame Scarron," wrote Madame de Sévigné in 1672; "her disposition is amiable and marvellously upright." One can fancy what conversation might be between these choice women, both so superior, so well-instructed, so witty, complementing each other by their very diversities.

Madame de Sévigné, a strong and richly endowed nature, a young and beautiful widow, virtuous but with a free and dauntless humor, a dazzling Céliméne, sister to Molière as Sainte-Beuve calls her, a woman whose character, speech, and writing are alike intense, justifies what was said to her by her friend

Madame de La Fayette: "You seem born for pleasures, and they seem to have been made for you. Your presence augments entertainments, and entertainments augment your beauty when they form your surroundings. In a word, joy is the true condition of your soul, and chagrin is more contrary to you than to any one else." Her image, sparkling like her wit, appears to us in the midst of those fêtes which her pen brings to life again like the wand of a magician. "What shall I tell you? magnificences, illuminations, all France, worn out coats and gold brocade ones, jewels, braziers of fire and of flowers, heaps of carriages, cries in the streets, lighted torches, carriages backing and people run over, in fine, a whirl, dissipation, questions without answers, compliments without knowing what one says, civilities without knowing to whom one is speaking, feet tangled in trains."

Madame de Sévigné, whose letters passed from hand to hand in drawing-rooms and châteaus, wrote for the galleries somewhat. She says herself: "My style is so negligent that it needs a naturally worldly mind to put up with it."[1] But that does not prevent her from understanding the worth of it. When she lets her pen "trot with the bridle hanging loose," when she pleases herself by giving her daughter "the top of all the panniers, that is to say, the freshness of her wit, her head, her eyes, her pen,

[1] Letter of December 23, 1671.

her inkstand," and "the rest goes as it can," she very well knows that society dotes on this style in which all the graces and marvels of the great century are reflected as in a looking-glass. Her letters are the model of *chroniques*, to employ an expression used in existing journalism. In the nineteenth century, as in the seventeenth, it is a woman who carries off the palm for this species of literature which demands so much wit. Madame Émile de Girardin has been the Sévigné of our epoch.

Madame de Maintenon could not or would not aspire to this wholly worldly glory. Far from aiming at effect, she voluntarily diminishes that which she produces. Like a true devotee who tones down the brilliancy of her glances, she moderates her style and tempers her wit. She sacrifices brilliant qualities to solid ones; too much imagination, too much fervor, alarm her. Saint-Cyr must not resemble the hôtel d'Albret or the hôtel de Richelieu; one must not speak to nuns as one would to blue-stockings.

Enjoyment, Gallic animation, good-tempered gaiety, fall to the lot of Madame de Sévigné; what marks Madame de Maintenon is experience, reason, profundity. The one laughs from ear to ear; the other barely smiles. The one has illusions about everything, admirations which border on *naïveté*, ecstasies when in presence of the royal sun; the other never allows herself to be fascinated either by the King or the court, by men, women, or things. She has seen human grandeurs too close at hand not to understand

their nothingness, and her conclusions bear the imprint of a profound sadness. Madame de Sévigné also has attacks of melancholy at times. But the cloud passes quickly, and she is again in broad sunshine. Gaiety, frank, communicative, radiant gaiety, is the basis of the character of this woman, more witty, seductive, amusing, than any other. Madame de Sévigné shines by imagination; Madame de Maintenon by judgment. The one permits herself to be dazzled, inebriated; the other always preserves her indifference. The one exaggerates the splendors of the court; the other sees them as they are. The one is more of a woman; the other, more of a saint.

To those who still feel an antipathy to Madame de Maintenon, we venture to offer a word of counsel: it is, to read before judging. The letters of this calumniated woman are an autobiography which shows us every fold of her heart, and are not less interesting from the psychological than from the historical point of view. More reflection than vivacity, more wisdom than passion, more gravity than charm, more authority than grace, more solidity than brilliancy, —such are the characteristics of a correspondence which might justify the expression: The style is the woman.

XIV

THE OLD AGE OF MADAME DE MONTESPAN

IT is through their pride that those are punished who have sinned by pride, and haughty natures are nearly always those whom Providence condemns to cruel humiliations. Of all the favorites of Louis XIV., Madame de Montespan had been the most arrogant and despotic; she was also the most humiliated.[1] Unable to accustom herself to her deposition, she remained more than ten years at court, although she had become burdensome to the King and to herself. "People said she was like one of those unhappy souls who come back to expiate their faults in the places where they committed them."[2] There was a remnant of irony and wrath in the semi-conversion of this haughty Mortemart. Going to see Madame de Maintenon one day, she met there the curé and the gray sisters of Versailles, who had come to attend a charitable meeting. "Do you know, Madame,"

[1] *Madame de Montespan et Louis XIV.*, historical study by M. Pierre Clément. 1 vol. Didier.

[2] *Souvenirs* of Madame de Caylus.

said she, accosting her, "that your ante-chamber is wonderfully adorned for your prayers?"

The King continued to see the mother of the legitimated children. Every day, after Mass, he went to spend a few minutes with her, but, as it were, from duty, not pleasure. In 1686, at Marly, she said to him in a moment of exasperation: "I have a favor to ask you. Leave to me the care of entertaining the people of the second carriage and of diverting the ante-chamber." Between Louis XIV. and his former mistress there was neither unreserve, confidence, love, nor friendship. What remained after their liaison was not even a souvenir, not even respect, but only remorse. Devoured by ambition and by scruples, dragged hither and thither by her passions as if by so many wild horses, Madame de Montespan was for many long years the prey of that daily, hourly struggle which is one of the most painful psychological agonies that can be imagined.

Massillon, the Racine of the Christian pulpit, the moralist preacher, so skilful in sounding the depths of the female heart, has described better than any one else those fitful repentances which entail all the bitterness of penitence without giving any of its consolations: "These hearts which the world has always occupied, and which wish to consecrate to God the remains of a wholly mundane existence, what a buckler of brass do they not oppose to grace? . . . They may seek for the kingdom of God and the hidden treasure of the Gospel, but it is like the

wretched slaves condemned to seek for gold through hard rocks in toilsome mines; . . . it seems as if in virtue they were playing another's part; although they are seeking salvation in good faith, there appears in them a nameless constraint and strangeness which make one think they are merely pretending."

Madame de Montespan wanted to leave the court, but she had not the courage. She could say to herself, like Saint Augustine in his *Confessions:* "These trifles of trifles, these vanities of vanities, draw me by my garment of flesh, and whisper in my ear: 'And are you sending us away? What, after this moment shall we be no longer with you? . . . for ever?' This interior struggle was but a duel between myself and me."

The progress that goes on between the first symptoms of repentance and the most complete and absolute penitence is an interesting one to study. The former favorite ended by comprehending the truth of Massillon's words: "What comparison is there between the frightful remorse of conscience, that hidden worm which gnaws us incessantly, that sadness of crime which undermines and brings us down, that weight of iniquity which overwhelms us, that interior sword which pierces us, and the lonely sorrow of penitence which worketh salvation? My God! can one complain of Thee when one has known the world? And the thorns of the Cross, are they not flowers when compared to those that beset the paths of iniquity?"

There is an undercurrent of morality in public opinion which makes the crowd contemplate with a sort of pleasure the decay and ruin of certain fortunes. Madame de Montespan no longer met friendly glances in the court which had lately been filled with her flatterers. Thus it is that vice nearly always finds its chastisement here below. Short as it is, life is long enough for the vengeance of God to be accomplished, even on the earth.

After long clinging to the wrecks of her fortune and her beauty, like a shipwrecked sailor to the fragments of his vessel, she who had formerly been called the mistress "thundering and triumphant," at last resigned herself to retirement. On March 15, 1691, she caused Bossuet to inform the King that she had chosen her course of action, and would this time abandon Versailles forever. Thus the prelate who had essayed sixteen years before to wrest her from the clasp of guilty passions was the same to whom she now had recourse to break the last link of the chain. And yet she still had hesitations and regrets. A month after this pious resolution, Dangeau wrote: "Madame de Montespan has been at Clagny for several days, and has gone back to Paris. She says she has not absolutely given up the court, that she will see the King sometimes, and that in fact they have been somewhat hasty in unfurnishing her apartment." But the favorite had been taken at her word. Her quarters in the château of Versailles were thenceforward occupied by the Duke du Maine.

She was never again to see the theatre of her sorry triumphs. For the King her departure was a deliverance.

Madame de Montespan lived by turns at the abbey of Fontevrault, where her sister was abbess; at the waters of Bourbon, where she went every summer; at the château of Oiron, which she had purchased; and at the convent of St. Joseph, situated in Paris on the site now occupied by the Ministry of War. In this convent she received the most notable personages of the court. The only armchair in her salon was her own. "All France went there," says Saint-Simon; "she spoke to each one like a queen, and as to visits, she paid none, not even to Monsieur, nor Madame, nor the grand Mademoiselle, nor to the hôtel Condé." There was a superbly furnished chamber at the château of Oiron, and though the King never went there, it was called the King's chamber.

From time to time the fallen favorite dreamed still of that sceptre of the left hand which she had once wielded with such an audacity of pride. She was by turns ashamed and proud of being the mother of legitimated children. But by slow degrees, serious thoughts displaced those of vanity and spite. The world was vanquished by heaven. Scandal gave way to edification. The penitent arrived not only at remorse but at macerations, fasts, and hair-cloths. This woman, once so fastidious, so elegant, limited herself to the coarsest underlinen, and wore a belt and garters studded with iron points. She came at

last to give all she had to the poor. For several hours a day she busied herself in making coarse clothing for them.

Close by her château of Oiron she founded a hospital of which she was rather the servant than the superior. She nursed the sick herself, and dressed their sores. As M. Pierre Clément has said so well in the fine study he has devoted to her, the scandal had been great, the defiance of morality, law, and the prescriptions of religion insolent and prolonged; but when they proceed from so haughty a nature, repentance and humility have redoubled value. By her confessor's orders she resigned herself to the act which cost her most; she wrote a most humbly worded letter to her husband, asking his pardon and offering either to return to him if he would deign to receive her, or to go to any residence which he might choose to assign for her. M. de Montespan did not even answer.

According to Saint-Simon, the former favorite was so tormented by the terrors of death in her latest years that she hired several women whose only occupation was to watch with her at night. "She slept with her curtains open, plenty of candles in her chamber, and her watchers around her, whom, every time she woke, she wanted to find chatting, playing cards, or eating, so as to be sure they were not drowsy." I have difficulty in believing such an assertion to be exact. Madame de Montespan was too proud for such pusillanimity. Fear did not

enter her soul. It is certain that she died with as much dignity as courage, even by Saint-Simon's own avowal.

In May, 1707, when she started for the baths of Bourbon she was not ill, and yet she had a presentiment that her end was approaching. Under its influence she had paid all the pensions she was in the habit of giving for two years in advance, and doubled her customary alms. Hardly had she arrived at Bourbon when she took to her bed, never again to leave it. Face to face with death, she neither defied nor feared it. "Father," she said to the Capuchin who was assisting her at the last moments, "exhort me as an ignorant person, as simply as you can." After summoning all her domestics around her, she asked pardon for the scandal she had given, and thanked God for permitting her to die in a place where she was distant from the children of her sin.

When her soul had departed, her body once so beautiful, so flattered, became "the apprenticeship of the surgeon of a steward from I don't know where, who happened to be at Bourbon, and who wanted to open it without knowing how to begin."[1] There was a dispute between the priests and canons when the coffin was taken to the church, where it was to remain until it could be sent to Poitiers and placed in a family tomb. The death of a woman who for more than thirty years, from 1660 to 1691,

[1] Saint-Simon, *Notes sur le Journal de Dangeau.*

had played so great a part at court, caused no impression there. Louis XIV. had long considered his former mistress as dead to him. Dangeau contented himself with writing in his journal: "Saturday, May 28, 1707, at Marly: Before the King went out hunting it was learned that Madame de Montespan died yesterday at Bourbon, at three o'clock in the morning. The King, after chasing a stag, promenaded in the gardens until night."

The Duke du Maine, the Count de Toulouse, and the Duchesses of Bourbon and Chartres were formally prohibited to wear mourning for their mother. D'Autin, her only legitimate child, put on black garments. But he was too good a courtier to be sad when the King was not so. He received his sovereign at Petit-Bourg a few days afterward, and in one single night had an alley of chestnut trees, which was not to the master's taste, removed. As to Madame de Montespan, no one mentioned her name again. Such is the world. It is not worth the trouble of loving it.

XV

THE DAUGHTERS OF LOUIS XIV.

THE *princesses* was the title by which the three legitimated daughters of Louis XIV., one by Mademoiselle de La Vallière and the other two by Madame de Montespan, were known at court. The first of them, born in 1666, married Prince Louis Armand de Conti. The second, born in 1673, married the Duke de Bourbon. The third, born in 1677, married the Duke de Chartres who became Duke of Orleans and regent of France. The Princess of Conti was more beautiful than Mademoiselle de La Vallière. The Duchesses of Bourbon and Chartres had the wit and pride of Madame de Montespan. The three princesses, who were as proud of their birth as if they had been legitimate daughters, had a great place in the heart of Louis XIV. The court surrounded them with homage; and although they did not play an important political rôle, yet they must figure in the gallery of the women of Versailles.

The birth of the future Princess of Conti was veiled in mystery. Mademoiselle de La Vallière

had concealed her pregnancy. The very night before her delivery she made her appearance in the royal apartment in presence of the whole court, in a splendid ball dress, and with uncovered head. A year later her daughter was legitimated by letters patent which are a sign of the times. Concerning his favorite, Louis XIV. said, in naming her Duchess: "Although her modesty has frequently opposed our desire to raise her sooner to a rank proportionate to our esteem and her good qualities, yet the affection we have for her, and justice, do not permit us to defer any longer our acknowledgment of merits so well known to us, nor longer to refuse to nature the effects of our tenderness for Marie Anne, our natural daughter." The child was called Mademoiselle de Blois.

In 1674, the year when the Duchess de La Vallière retired to a Carmelite convent, Madame de Sévigné wrote: "Mademoiselle de Blois is a masterpiece; the King and every one else is enchanted with her. She is a prodigy of attractiveness and grace. She has charmed the court by her beauty from her earliest infancy. People pretend that the Emperor of Morocco fell madly in love with her at sight of her portrait." She was fifteen years old when, in January, 1680, she married Louis Armand de Bourbon, Prince de Conti, nephew of the great Condé, who, like all his family, testified the most lively joy on occasion of this marriage.

The young married couple seemed delighted with

each other. "Their love is like a romance," wrote Madame de Sévigné, "and the King is amused by their inclination." The courtiers went to the Carmelite convent[1] of the rue Saint-Jacques to pay their compliments to the former Duchess de La Vallière, now Sister Louise of Mercy, who "perfectly conciliated her style and her black veil, her maternal tenderness with that of a spouse of Jesus Christ."[2] In this mystic asylum where, according to Bossuet's expression, one is straitened on all sides so as to respire no longer except towards heaven, the pious Carmelite, showing herself for the last time, seemed the very image of repentance and sanctity.

Madame de Sévigné thus describes to her daughter the emotion produced by such an angel: "To my eyes she still possessed all the charms we saw of old. Her eyes and her glances are the same; austerity, poor nourishment, and curtailed sleep have neither hollowed nor weakened them. That strange habit detracts nothing from her grace or good appearance. She said many kind things to me, and spoke of you so well and appropriately, all she said being so perfectly suitable to her that I think nothing could be better. . . . Truly, that habit and that retreat are a great dignity for her."[3]

[1] The Carmelite convent, situated opposite the Val-de-Grâce, extended from the rue Saint-Jacques to the rue d'Enfer. It had two entrances, one on the rue Saint-Jacques and one on the rue d'Enfer, the latter still existing at No. 67.

[2] Madame de Sévigné, Letter of December 29, 1679.

[3] Madame de Sévigné, Letter of January 5, 1680.

While the saintly Carmelite was expiating in the cloister the birth of the Princess de Conti, the young Princess was dazzling the court by her beauty, grace, and spirit. Like nearly all remarkably beautiful women, she was coquettish. Her husband managed her badly. He surrounded her with the most fashionable young people at the court, which naturally gave occasion for scandal. In 1685 she had the small-pox, and the Prince de Conti, having shut himself up with her, took the disease and died of it suddenly. "What a death was that of the Prince de Conti! After having escaped all the infinite perils of the war in Hungary, he has just died here of a malady which he scarcely had. He is the son of a saintly man and a saintly woman, and in consequence of wrongly directed thoughts, he has played the fool and debauchee, and died without confession."[1]

A widow at twenty and easily consolable, the young Princess continued to be the ornament of Versailles. Monseigneur, as the Dauphin was styled, was continually in her apartments; Versailles became rejuvenated in this little haunt of pleasure. There was nothing but "promenades, rendezvous, love letters, serenades, and all that was found delightful in the good old times."[2] It was there that Monseigneur became acquainted with Mademoiselle Choin,

[1] Madame de Sévigné, Letter of November 24, 1685.
[2] Madame de Sévigné, Letter to Bussy.

who was maid of honor to the Princess. According to Madame de Caylus, this young lady's mind was not calculated to shine anywhere except in an antechamber, and was capable of nothing better than describing what she had seen. "And yet," she adds in her *Souvenirs*, "this same Mademoiselle Choin carried off from the most beautiful princess in the world the heart of M. Clermont, at that time an officer of the guards. Monseigneur had a particularly good opinion of him, and had introduced him to the Countess de Conti, whom he made such love to that he inspired her with a rather lively inclination."

The King, having been informed of this intrigue by means of letters intercepted at the postoffice, sent for his daughter, and showed her not only those she had written to Clermont, but those which the latter had addressed to Mademoiselle Choin.

"The Princess thought she would die," says Saint-Simon. "She threw herself at the King's feet, bathed them with her tears, and could hardly articulate. There was nothing but sobs, pardons, despairs, rages, and entreaties for justice and vengeance; she was speedily heard." Clermont and Mademoiselle Choin had to leave the court and resign their appointments. But Mademoiselle Choin remained the favorite of Monseigneur.[1] This happened in 1694.

The Princess de Conti resumed her accustomed

[1] Mademoiselle Choin presided at Meudon over the little court of Monseigneur, who always remained faithful to her. It is even claimed that he secretly married her.

dissipations and amusements: pleasure parties, balls, hunts, cards, collations at the Trianon or the Ménagerie, night promenades in the gardens. Meanwhile, Sister Louise of Mercy was redoubling her austerities. "Her natural delicacy had suffered infinitely from the real severity of her corporal and spiritual penitence as well as from that of a very sensitive heart which she concealed as well as she could. . . . She died with every mark of great sanctity in the midst of nuns to whom her gentleness and her virtues had given delight."[1] The Princess de Conti, notified too late, only reached the Carmelite convent of the rue Saint-Jacques in time to see her mother breathe her last.[2] At first she seemed very much afflicted; but Saint-Simon says she was quickly consoled. The whole court paid her visits of condolence.

The children of Madame de Montespan, who had lost their mother three years before, were greatly mortified by these public visits, seeing that in a parallel case they had not dared to receive any such. "They were still more so," adds Saint-Simon, "when they saw Madame, the Princess de Conti, contrary to all custom, drape her apartment in mourning for a simple nun, although she was her mother, — they who had none, and who for that reason had not dared even to wear the least sign of mourning on the death of Madame de Montespan. Between the

[1] Memoirs of the Duke de Saint-Simon.

[2] Mademoiselle de La Vallière died in June, 1710, after six years in the cloister.

situation of the Princess de Conti and that of the two other legitimated daughters of Louis XIV. there existed this difference: the first was designated in her letters of legitimation as the daughter of Mademoiselle de La Vallière, while in those of the other two their mother's name was not mentioned. This is why Saint-Simon, distinguishing between the simple and the double adultery, says that the Princess de Conti had a named and recognized mother, while the Duchesses of Bourbon and of Chartres had not.

The Duchess of Bourbon, who was at first called Mademoiselle de Nantes, had been legitimated in the year of her birth by letters patent in which Louis XIV. without naming the mother, had contented himself by alleging "the tenderness which nature gave him for his children, and many other reasons which considerably increased these sentiments in him." The young Princess was still a little girl when she married, in 1685, the Duke de Bourbon, grandson of the great Condé.

"It was a ridiculous thing," says the Marquis de Souches, "to see these two marionettes marry; for the Duke de Bourbon was excessively small. It was feared he would remain a dwarf, and they were obliged to wait until July before Mademoiselle de Nantes would be twelve years old."

Madame de Caylus says that the great Condé and his son neglected no means of testifying their joy, as they had omitted nothing to bring about this mar-

riage. As she grew up, the Duchess became very pretty. Saint-Simon praises "her figure formed by the tenderest loves, and her mind made to enjoy them to her liking, but without being dominated by them." But he represents her at the same time as egoistic, deceitful, and satirical. "She was," he says, "the siren of the poets, she had all their charms and all their perils." She loved pleasure, luxury, and extravagance. Thanks to Madame de Maintenon, she obtained in 1700 the payment of her debts by the King, who kept her secret from her father-in-law and her husband. If Saint-Simon and Madame de Caylus are to be believed, her conduct was not exemplary. She may have been the mistress of the second Prince de Conti,[1] he who had been elected King of Poland in 1697, after having fought valiantly at Fleurus, Steinkerque, Nerwinde, and in Hungary, but who was unable to take possession of his crown.

"The Prince de Conti," says Madame de Caylus, "opened his eyes to the charms of Madame the Duchess by dint of being told not to look at her; he loved her passionately, and if, on her part, she loved anything, it was certainly him, whatever may have happened since. . . . This affair was conducted with such admirable prudence that they never gave any one any hold over them." According to Saint-Simon, the Prince de Conti was "perfectly happy with

[1] François Louis de Bourbon, Prince de Conti. Born in 1664, he had married in 1688 the sister of the Duke de Bourbon, granddaughter of the great Condé.

Madame the Duchess, although M. the Duke was very singular and strangely jealous."

The Duke died on Shrove Tuesday in the year 1709. "Madame the Duchess, though surrounded by finery, masquerading habits, and a crowd of invited guests, lost none of her presence of mind. With her tearful ways she extorted from the King, though against his will and tardily enough, an income of 30,000 livres. Then her tears dried up, and her good humor returned. She received everybody in state. She was on her bed, in a widow's gown, bordered and lined with ermine."[1] The Prince de Conti died almost at the same time as the Duke. "Madame the Duchess," says Saint-Simon, "was the only one to whom he had not been inconstant. He would have paid her the homage of his grandeur, and she would have shone by his lustre. What disheartening memories, with no consolation but Lassé junior![2] For want of a better she became inordinately attached to him, and the attachment has lasted for thirty years. . . . She was not made for tears. She wanted to forget her troubles, and to do so, plunged first into amusements and then into pleasures, even to the most extreme indelicacies, considering her age and condition. She tried to drown her vexations in them, and she succeeded." Saint-

[1] Memoirs of Saint-Simon.

[2] Lassé was a brigadier of infantry. According to Saint-Simon "he became openly the master of Madame the Duchess, and the director of her affairs."

Simon's exaggerations are to be suspected, however; he is always malevolent, and often unjust.

The suspicions of the ruthless Duke and peer constantly hover over the private lives of two of the daughters of Louis XIV. But he spares the third one, at all events, and though he accuses her of an almost satanic pride, he insinuates nothing against the purity of her morals. This Princess was at first styled Mademoiselle de Blois (the same name as the daughter of Mademoiselle de La Vallière). She was fourteen when she was married, in 1692, to the Duke de Chartres, son of Monsieur, Duke of Orleans. Saint-Simon has described the exasperation of the young Prince's mother, furious at seeing her son espouse a bastard: "She strode up and down, handkerchief in hand and weeping unrestrainedly, talking rather loud, gesticulating, and reminding one of Ceres after the abduction of Proserpine. . . . . People generally going to await the breaking up the council and the King's Mass in the gallery,[1] Madame went there; her son approached her, as he did every day, to kiss her hand. At that moment Madame gave him so resounding a slap that it could be heard several paces off, and which, in presence of the whole court, covered the poor Prince with confusion, and filled the very numerous spectators, of whom I was one, with prodigious astonishment."

[1] The Gallery of Mirrors which the King passed through every morning on his way to the chapel after having presided at the Ministerial Council.

Let us note, in passing, that in a letter to the Rhinegrave Louise, Madame says that a rumor is in circulation that she had slapped her son in the face, but that it is absolutely false. The marriage was celebrated with great pomp. Louis XIV. was gratified to find the great lords and ladies rivalling each other in magnificence. There was a great ball at Versailles where the Duke of Burgundy danced for the first time, and it was the King of England who gave the bridegroom his shirt. A month later, March 19, 1692, the Duke du Maine, the eldest of the children of Louis XIV. by Madame de Montespan, married Mademoiselle de Charolais, daughter of the Prince and granddaughter of the great Condé. The legitimated thus found themselves established in the court of Versailles which they could not have left without sadness, for it was the most brilliant and most envied abode in Europe.

Louis XIV. who had originally said concerning the offspring of adultery: "These persons must never marry," caused them to make magnificent marriages. Curious thing, the Duchess of Chartres naïvely fancied that she had honored the King's nephew by marrying him. Madame wrote on this head: "My son's wife thinks she did him a great honor in marrying him. She says he is only the nephew of the King, while she is his daughter. This is to forget that one is also the son of his mother. Never would she comprehend that." Duclos says that people jocosely compared her to Minerva who, recognizing

no mother, prided herself on being the daughter of Jupiter. Haughty as she was, this Princess was timidity itself in presence of Louis XIV. "The King could make her faint with a single severe look, and Madame de Maintenon, too, perhaps; at all events she trembled before her, and about the most ordinary things, and in public she never replied to them without stammering and looking frightened. I say replied, for to address the King first was beyond her strength."[1] The Duchess de Chartres was none the less a woman of great intelligence, "having a natural eloquence, a justness of expression, and a fluency and singularity in the choice of terms which always surprised one, together with that manner peculiar to Madame de Montespan and her sisters and which was transmitted to none but those intimate with her or to those whom she had brought up."[2] In spite of all her intelligence, the Duchess was unable either to gain the attachment of her husband or to give a good education to her daughter, who married in 1710 the Duke de Berry, third son of the grand Dauphin.

Saint-Simon, whose tongue is always envenomed, has ill-treated no woman in his Memoirs so much as this poor Duchess de Berry who, a widow at seventeen, died at twenty-four. If one must believe the spiteful Duke and peer, she was a bad wife, a bad

[1] Memoirs of the Duke de Saint-Simon.
[2] *Idem.*

daughter, and a bad Christian; she got drunk; she mocked at religion; and she wanted La Haye, her husband's equerry, to elope with her. "She was a prodigy of art, pride, ingratitude, and folly, and also of debauchery and stubbornness." The Duchess was very wrong, without any doubt; but we incline to think that Saint-Simon exaggerates. Possibly she was neither better nor worse than many women of her time. It is certain, at any rate, that she grieved her mother, already much tormented by the rivalries and dissensions of the court.

The three daughters of Louis XIV. were not always on good terms with each other. There was a time when their quarrels multiplied to such a degree that the King threatened, if they continued, to intern all three of them in their country houses. The menace was effectual, and thenceforward they disputed on the sly. Louis XIV. loved his daughters greatly in spite of their defects. He was at the same time a just king and an affectionate father. He showed a real tenderness, a solicitude, and a devotion in his treatment of them which never altered. When they were ill he was grieved and troubled; he would rise several times in the night to go and visit them. Madame de Caylus relates that the Duchess of Bourbon having been seized with small-pox at Fontainebleau, Louis XIV. was absolutely determined to go to see her. The Prince (the great Condé) stood at the door to prevent him from entering. There a great struggle

took place between paternal love and the zeal of a courtier, a struggle "very glorious for Madame the Duchess." Louis XIV. was the stronger and went in, in spite of the resistance of the great Condé. Thus behaved this King who can only be treated as an egotist by those who know him badly or who do not know him at all.

XVI

THE DUCHESS OF BURGUNDY

THE court was all agog because a little girl of eleven years had just arrived in France. This child was Marie-Adélaïde, the future Duchess of Burgundy, daughter of Victor Amadeus II., Duke of Savoy. On Sunday, November 4, 1696, the town of Montargis was *en fête*. The bells were ringing with all their might. Louis XIV., leaving Fontainebleau in the morning, had come to meet the young Princess destined to espouse his grandson, and all eyes were bent on the first interview between her and the Sun-King. He received her as she was alighting from the carriage, and said to Dangeau: "Will you allow me to fill your post for to-day?" (Dangeau was chevalier of honor to the Princess.)

The newcomer charmed the King from the first moment by the distinction of her manners, her native prettiness, her little responses full of grace and spirit. Louis XIV. embraced her in the carriage; she kissed his hand several times while ascending the staircase that led to the apartment she was to occupy.

When the King returned to his chamber, Dangeau took the liberty of asking him whether he were contented with the Princess. "I am too much so; I can scarcely contain my joy." Then, turning toward Monsieur he added: "How I wish that his poor mother could be here a few moments to witness the joy we are having." He wrote afterwards to Madame de Maintenon: "She let me speak first, and afterwards she answered me very well, but with a little embarrassment that would have pleased you. I led her to her chamber through the crowd, letting them see her from time to time by bringing the torches near her face. She stood this walk and the lights with grace and modesty. She has the best grace and the most beautiful shape that I ever saw, dressed fit to be painted and her hair also, very bright and beautiful eyes with admirable black lashes, complexion very smooth, white and red as one could wish, and a great quantity of the finest fair hair that one ever saw. . . . She has failed in nothing, and has conducted herself as you might have done."

Through her mother, Marie-Adélaïde was the granddaughter of that beautiful Henrietta of England whose life and death have been immortalized by Bossuet in her funeral oration. She was about to revive the charm of this greatly regretted princess, and her presence at Versailles renewed the joy and animation of happier days. She was installed, immediately on her arrival, in the chamber formerly

occupied by the Queen and afterwards by the Bavarian dauphiness.[1]

The King made her a present of the beautiful menagerie of Versailles which is opposite the Trianon palace. Never was a grandfather more tenderly affectionate towards his granddaughter. He took pains to contrive amusements and recreations for her. Madame (the Princess Palatine) wrote, November 8, 1696: "Every one is becoming a child again. The Princess d'Harcourt and Madame de Pontchartrain played at blindman's buff day before yesterday with the Princess and Monsieur the Dauphin; Monsieur, the Princess de Conte, Madame de Ventadour, my two other ladies and myself played it yesterday."

Naturally, Madame de Maintenon was charged with finishing the education of the little Princess. The first time she took her to Saint-Cyr she had her received with great ceremony. The superior complimented her; the community, in long mantles, awaited her at the door of the cloister; all the pupils were ranged in double lines through which she passed on her way to the church; little girls of her own age recited a dialogue tinctured with delicate praise. The Princess was delighted and asked to come again. Afterwards Madame de Maintenon took her regularly to Saint-Cyr two or three times a week, to spend the entire day and follow the lessons

[1] Room No. 115 of the *Notice du Musée de Versailles*, by Eudore Soulié.

of the red class. There was no more etiquette. Marie-Adélaïde wore the same uniform as the pupils, and was called Mademoiselle de Lastic. "She was good, affable, gracious to everybody, occupying herself with the different affairs of the ladies, and with all the works and studies of the pupils; subjecting herself frankly to all the practices of the house, even to silence; running and playing with the reds in the long alleys of the garden; going with them to choir, confession, and catechism. At other times she put on the habit of the ladies, and did the honors of the house to some illustrious visitor, notably the Queen of England."[1]

Louis XIV., charmed with the Princess, decided that she should be married the very day she was twelve years old. December 7, 1797, she espoused Louis of France, Duke of Burgundy, who was fifteen and a half years old. The bridegroom wore a black mantle embroidered with gold, and a white doublet with diamond buttons; the mantle was lined with rose satin. The bride had a robe and under petticoat of cloth of silver, bordered with precious stones, and she wore the crown diamonds.[2] Cardinal de Coislin gave the young couple the nuptial benediction in the chapel of Versailles. After Mass there was a grand banquet for the royal family in the room known as the ante-chamber of the Queen's apartment.[3]

[1] *Memoires des Dames de Saint-Cyr.*

[2] Letter of the Princess Palatine, December 7, 1697.

[3] Room No. 117 of the *Notice du Musée.*

In the evening the court assembled in the Salon of Peace[1] to witness the fireworks set off at the end of the Swiss lake, and then to take supper served, like the banquet, in the ante-chamber of the Queen's apartment. After supper they passed on into the sleeping chamber of the Duchess,[2] where there was a bed of green velvet embroidered with gold and silver, which was blessed by Cardinal de Coislin. A moment later, the King sent all the men out of the room. The Duke of Burgundy disrobed before the ladies, and the Queen of England handed him his shirt. As soon as the couple had been put to bed, Louis XIV. summoned the ambassador of Savoy and showed him that they were lying down. The ambassador immediately sent a gentleman to carry this news to Victor Amadeus.

Nevertheless, this marriage, concluded amidst so many splendors, was as yet merely for form's sake, seeing that the pair were so extremely youthful. The King would not permit his grandson to kiss even the tip of the Duchess's finger until they should actually come together. Hence the young Duke arose again at the end of fifteen minutes, dressed himself in the chamber and returned to his own room through the hall of the guards.

There was a grand ball in the Gallery of Mirrors, December 11. The pyramids of candles glittered even

[1] Room No. 114 of the *Notice du Musée.*
[2] Room No. 115 of the *Notice du Musée.*

more than the lustres and girandoles. Louis XIV. had said he would be pleased to have the court display great luxury, and himself, though for a long while he had worn none but very simple costumes, had put on a superb one. It was who should surpass the others in richness and invention. There was hardly silver and gold enough to be had. The King, who had encouraged all these expenses, said notwithstanding, that he could not understand how husbands could be foolish enough to let themselves be ruined by their wives' dresses.

Two days after the marriage the Duchess wanted to show herself in state dress to her friends at Saint-Cyr. She was all in white, and her robe was so heavily embroidered with silver that she could hardly bear the weight of it. The community received the Princess in great pomp and conducted her to the church, where hymns were chanted.

The separation of the young spouses lasted for two years after the ceremony of their marriage, and, according to Dangeau's journal, did not end until toward the close of 1699. Until then the Duke of Burgundy came to see the Duchess every day. They were even allowed to chat together, but there were always ladies in the room during their interviews.

The amiable Princess is now one of the most attractive of women. Without her all would wither at this court, which would resemble a magnificent convent. The flowers would be less fair, the fields less

gay, the streams less clear. Thanks to her seductive charm everything revives, all lights up under the rays of a vernal sun. She loves Louis XIV. sincerely. One cannot approach this exceptional man, for whom the word prestige would have to be invented if it did not exist, and who is as affectionate, good, and affable as he is majestic and imposing. The admiration professed for him by the young Princess is sincere. Grateful and flattered by the kindness he shows her, she venerates him as the most glorious representative of divine right, and while she venerates she amuses him. She flings her arms about his neck at any time, she sits down on his knees, she diverts him by every sort of badinage, she looks at his papers, she opens and reads his letters in his presence. A continual succession of pleasure parties and entertainments goes on. Followed by a train of women of twenty, the Princess loves to sail in a gondola on the grand canal of the Park of Versailles, and to remain there several hours of the night, sometimes until sunrise. Hunts, collations, comedies, serenades, illuminations, sailing parties, fireworks, every day a new diversion is organized.

The King wishes that the Duchess of Burgundy should please herself in this court of which she is the ornament and the hope. She must smooth out the wrinkles of the monarch, who is weary of fame and pleasures. She must be the good genius, the enchantress of Versailles. The mirrors of the great gallery must reflect her splendid toilets, her dazzling

ornaments. She must appear in the gardens like an Armida, in the forests like a nymph, on the water like a siren.

In the hall of the Queen's guards[1] there may be seen at present a full length portrait of the Princess. She is standing, dressed in a robe of cloth of silver, and holds in her left hand a bouquet of orange flowers. A woman in Polish costume is holding up the train of her lilied mantle. In front of her a cupid is holding a cushion on which flowers are lying. At the back of the picture one sees a garden and a pedestal on which is the signature of the painter: Santerre, 1709. What the artist has done so well with his brush Saint-Simon has done still better with his pen. The sarcastic Duke and peer becomes an enthusiastic admirer, a poet, when he describes the charms of the Princess: her eyes the most beautiful and speaking in the world, her gallant, gracious, majestic pose of the head, her expressive smile, her gait like that of a goddess on the clouds. He admires her moral qualities no less, even while finding defects in her. It pleases him to recognize that she is sweet, accessible, candid, though with due reserve, compassionate, grieved to cause the least sadness, full of consideration for all who come near her, gracious to those about her, kind to her domestics, friendly to her ladies, and the soul of the court which adores her; "all is lacking to every one in her absence, all is

[1] Room No. 118 of the *Notice du Musée.*

replenished by her presence, her extreme kindness makes her infinitely depended on, and her manners attach all hearts."

Nevertheless calumny does not spare her. People accuse her in a whisper with certain inconsistencies which malice bruits about and exaggerates. They go so far as to pretend that two lovers, MM. de Maulevrier and de Nangis are extremely well treated by her. They wish to discover serious faults in what is nothing but the desire to please, natural to all pretty women. Madame de Caylus says concerning the passion attributed to the Duchess for M. de Nangis: "I am convinced that this intrigue was carried on by looks, or at most by letters. I am persuaded of this for two reasons, one that Madame the Dauphiness was too well guarded, and the other that Nangis was too much in love with another woman who watched him closely, and who has said to me that at the times when he was suspected of being with Madame the Dauphiness she was very sure that he was not, because he was with her. It was much rather a gallantry than a passion." Surrounded by a court of witty, gossiping, and often light young women, the Duchess of Burgundy must more than once have been attacked by malevolent insinuations and the little perfidies, which the jealousy inherent in the feminine character allows itself against princesses as well as against private persons. The Duchess understood it perfectly and was moved and afflicted by it.

Other causes for sadness threw their shadows over an existence apparently so fair and joyous. Victor Amadeus had quarrelled with France, and the house of Savoy was incurring the greatest dangers. The Duchess of Burgundy was obliged to conceal her sentiments for her former country in the depths of her heart, but the more necessary it was to hide them the more vivacious they became. What a grief to know that her pregnant mother, her infirm grandmother, her sick brothers, and the Duke, her father, were wandering on the Piedmont road, threatened with utter ruin. June 21, 1706, she wrote to her grandmother,[1] the widow of Charles Emmanuel: "Judge what is my anxiety about all that is happening to you, loving you so tenderly, and having all the affection possible for my father, my mother, and my brothers. I cannot see them in such an unfortunate condition without having tears in my eyes. . . . I am in a sadness which no amusement can diminish, and which will not depart, my dear grandmother, until your sorrows do. . . . Send me news of all that is dearest to me in the world."[2]

The Duchess of Burgundy suffered simultaneously

[1] Marie-Jeanne-Baptiste, called Madame Royale, daughter of Charles Amadeus of Savoy and Elizabeth of Vendôme, espoused in 1665 the Duke of Savoy, Charles Emmanuel II., father of Victor Amadeus II.

[2] See the interesting correspondence of the Duchess of Burgundy and her sister the Queen of Spain, wife of Philip V., published, with a very good preface, by Madame the Countess Della Rocca.

from the disasters of both her countries, Savoy and France. "Make us some saints to obtain peace for us," said Madame de Maintenon to the inmates of Saint-Cyr. The Duchess, as Labeaumelle remarks, exhibited in the perilous circumstances of the country "the dignity of the first woman of the State, the sentiments of a Roman matron for Rome, and the agitations of a soul which desired the good with an ardor beyond her age."

The hour of great sorrows had arrived. As M. Capefigue has said so well: "The difficult time for a powerful and fortunate King is old age. Though the head remain firm, the arms grow feeble, garlands wither, even laurels take a grayish tint. People respect you still, but they do not love you any more; cocked hats with waving plumes bring out the wrinkles of the face and the lines of the forehead; the gold-headed cane is no longer a sort of sceptre, but a staff which sustains the feeble legs and the stooping body." For the Duchess of Burgundy the aging Louis XIV. preserved all his prestige. She loved him sincerely. "The public," says Madame de Caylus, "has difficulty in comprehending that princes act simply and naturally, because they do not see them near enough at hand to judge, and because the marvellous that they are always seeking is never found in simple conduct and orderly sentiments. Hence they wish to believe that the Duchess resembled her father, and that at the age of eleven, when she came to France, she was as crafty and

politic as he was, and affected for the King and Madame de Maintenon a tenderness she did not possess. I, who have had the honor of seeing her very near, judge otherwise. I have seen her weeping in such good faith over the great age of these two persons, who she thought must die before her, that I cannot doubt her tenderness for the King."

Louis XIV., who knew the human heart, perceived with his usual perspicacity that the Duchess of Burgundy had a sincere affection for him. It was on that account that he displayed an exceptional attachment for her. Like a rose blooming in a cemetery, the young and enchanting Princess charmed and consoled the sorrowful years of the great King. It was the last smile of fortune, the last ray of sunlight. But alas! the fair rose was to bloom but a day, and yet a little longer and all would be enshrouded in gloom.

Since 1711, when Monseigneur died, the Duke of Burgundy had been Dauphin, and Saint-Simon reports that the Duchess said, in speaking of the ladies who criticised her: "They will have to reckon with me, and I will be their queen." "Alas!" he adds, "she believed it, the charming Princess, and who would not have believed it with her?" And yet, according to the Princess Palatine, she was convinced that her end was near. Madame thus expresses herself: "A learned astrologer of Turin, having drawn the horoscope of Madame the Dauphiness, had predicted to her all that would happen to her, and that

she would die in her twenty-seventh year. She often spoke of it. One day she said to her husband: 'See, the time is coming when I must die. You cannot remain without a wife on account of your rank and your devotion. Tell me, I entreat you, whom you will marry?' He answered: 'I hope God will never punish me enough to let me see you die; and if this misfortune must befall me, I shall never remarry, for I should follow you to the grave in eight days. . . .' While the Dauphiness was still in good health, fresh and gay, she often said: 'Well, I must rejoice, because I cannot rejoice long, for I shall die this year.' I thought it was a pleasantry; but the thing was only too real. When she fell ill she said she would not recover."

The nearer the Dauphiness approached the fatal time the better she grew. One might have thought she wanted to deepen the grief that would be caused by her premature death. The Princess Palatine, ordinarily so malevolent, so sarcastic, avows it herself: "Having," says she, "enough intelligence to note her faults, the Dauphiness could not do other than try to correct them; this, in fact, is what she did, and to such a point as to excite general astonishment. She continued thus to the end."

Madame the Viscountess de Noailles[1] has said in

[1] *Lettres inédites de la Duchesse de Bourgogne*, preceded by a short notice of her life by Madame the Viscountess de Noailles. A volume of fifty pages of which only a small number of copies has been printed.

the most touching way: "From time to time history offers us attractive personages who move the reader even to affection. . . . Providence frequently withdraws them from the world in their youth, still adorned with the charms which time removes, and the hopes which it might have realized. The Duchess of Burgundy was one of these graceful apparitions."

Attacked with a terrible malady which was, it appears, the measles, but which was attributed to poison, the Duchess was taken away in a few days from the King of whom she was the consolation, the husband who idolized her, the court whose ornament she was, and France of which she was the hope. She died with equal dignity and courage in the most religious sentiments.

It was in her bedroom at Versailles,[1] on Friday, February 12, 1712, between eight and nine in the evening, that she breathed her last. Almost exactly two years before, in the same room, she had brought into the world the prince who was to be called Louis XV.[2] Her husband's grief was such that he could not survive a wife so beloved. Six days afterward he followed her to the tomb. "France," cries Saint-Simon, "fell at last beneath this final chastisement. God had shown her a prince whom she did not deserve. The earth was not worthy of him; he died ripe already for a blissful eternity." The very day

[1] Room No. 115 of the *Notice du Musée.*

[2] Louis XV. was born February 5, 1710.

of the Duke of Burgundy's death Madame wrote: "I am so overwhelmed that I cannot recover; I scarcely know what I am saying. You who have a good heart will certainly pity us, for the sadness that prevails here cannot be described."

Saint-Simon pretends that the sorrow caused Louis XIV. by the death of the Duchess of Burgundy "was the only real one he ever had in his life." This is not exact. The great King had profoundly regretted his mother, and Madame (the Princess Palatine) thus expresses herself concerning the grief that overwhelmed him in the death of his only son, the grand Dauphin: "I saw the King yesterday at eleven o'clock; he is a prey to such affliction that he would soften a rock; he does not fret, however, he speaks to everyone with a resigned sadness, and gives his orders with great firmness, but the tears come into his eyes every moment, and he stifles his sobs."[1] Such was the man whom superficial minds characterize as egoistic and insensitive.

On February 22, 1712, the bodies of the Duchess and the Duke of Burgundy were borne from Versailles to Saint-Denis on a single bier. The Dauphin, their eldest son, died the following March 8. He was five years and some months old. Thus the father, the mother, and the eldest son disappeared within twenty-four days. Three dauphins had died in a single year.

[1] Letter of April 16, 1711.

These events, so horrible in themselves, were made still more so by the widely prevalent false idea that these premature deaths were the result of poison. The Duke of Orleans was most perfidiously and unjustly accused of being the author of these crimes, and efforts were made to induce Louis XIV. to entertain this abominable suspicion. With the Duchess of Burgundy "were eclipsed joy, pleasures, amusements even, and every sort of favors. . . . If the court existed after her, it was only to languish."[1]

And yet, under the weight of so many trials the great soul of Louis XIV. was not enfeebled. "Amidst the lugubrious débris of his august house, Louis remains firm in the faith. God had breathed upon his numerous posterity, and in an instant it was effaced like characters written on the sand. Of all the princes who had surrounded him, and who formed as it were the rays and the glory of his crown, there remained but one feeble spark even then on the point of being extinguished. He adores Him who disposes of crowns and sceptres, and perhaps he sees in these domestic losses the mercy which is completing the effacement from the book of the Lord's justice the traces of his former guilty passions."[2]

All France was in despair. "This time of desolation," says Voltaire, "left so profound an impression in hearts that, during the minority of Louis XV.

[1] Memoirs of the Duke de Saint-Simon.
[2] Massillon, *Oraison funèbre de Louis le Grand.*

I have seen many persons who could not speak of these losses without shedding tears."[1]

M. Michelet, who cannot be accused of exaggerated admiration for the great century, is himself affected while relating the death of the charming Duchess of Burgundy. "The court," he says, "was literally as if stunned by the blow. One still weeps, a hundred and fifty years afterward, in reading the heart-rending pages in which Saint-Simon records his grief."[2]

Duclos has claimed, without indicating the source whence he obtained his information, that on the death of the Duchess of Burgundy, Madame de Maintenon and the King found in a casket that had belonged to the Princess, papers which extorted from the King the exclamation: "The little rogue betrayed us." From such a speech, so unlikely from the mouth of Louis XIV., Duclos infers a correspondence in which the daughter of Victor Amadeus had surrendered State secrets to him. This we believe to be one of those numerous hearsays, from which history is too often written. The archives of Turin have preserved no trace of this pretended correspondence, which is neither true nor probable. Assuredly the Duchess of Burgundy did not forget her native land. But after bidding adieu to Savoy, she had no longer any country but France.

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[1] Voltaire, *Siècle de Louis XIV.*

[2] Michelet, *Louis XIV. et le duc de Bourgogne.*

Doubtless, Italy may count among the fairest pearls of her casket those two intelligent and alluring sisters who both died so prematurely and left behind them so touching a remembrance: the Duchess of Burgundy and her sister the Queen of Spain, the valiant consort of Philip V. But the greater part of the Duchess of Burgundy's destiny was fulfilled in France, and her portrait must figure in the château of Versailles.

How many times in 1871, when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was, so to say, encamped in the midst of the Queen's apartments, did we evoke the souvenir of the charming Princess in this chamber where she slept from the time of her arrival at Versailles, and where, sixteen years and a half later, she breathed her last sigh! It was there that at eleven years of age, torn forever from her family, her friends, her country, she found herself alone among the splendors of a strange palace. 'Twas there the child grew, became a young girl, and then a young woman, increasing daily in graces and attractions. There, in the silence of the night she thought she beheld the brilliant phantoms of the world, the seductive images against which, perhaps, her reason battled with her heart. There she recalled, to aid her in resisting the temptations of an ardent soul, the austere instructions of Madame de Maintenon, who had written to her: "Have a horror of sin. Vice is full of evils and afflictions, even in this world. There is no joy, no repose, no true delight, but in

serving God." It was there that she beheld death coming, and welcomed its approach with a noble and religious courage. Poor Princess! Even in presence of her dead body disputes over etiquette went on. "Four bishops sitting in rochet and camail at the right side of the bed relieved each other like the ladies, when notified by the agents of the clergy. They claimed chairs with backs, kneeling cushions, and a holy water sprinkler. The first two were refused them; they had nothing but folding stools, and no cushions. They made such an outcry that they got the sprinkler."

Strictly speaking, history is nothing but a long funeral sermon. The more closely it is studied, the more it is seen to be full of tears. The view of a palace is as fruitful in lessons as that of a cemetery, and the château of Versailles, when one is surrounded there by the illustrious shades that have occupied it, suddenly assumes the aspect of an immense catafalque. The gildings are veiled with crape. One fancies that the fountains are weeping, and the sun of the great King is hidden behind a heavy cloud. Death is in every chamber, it stands at every door to make its dismal voice listened to, and to repeat the great saying: Vanity, all is vanity.

CONCLUSION

THE TOMBS

IT is the most melancholy of all spectacles to behold, in the trappings of sadness and death, the places which were once the theatre of splendors or of fêtes. While listening to the prayers of the dying succeed the flare of trumpets and joyous orchestral harmonies, one reflects painfully on the things of earth, and comprehends the inanity of glory, riches, and pleasure. The courtiers of Louis XIV. had to endure this impression when "this monarch of happiness, of majesty, of apotheosis," as Saint-Simon says, was about to breathe his last. The incomparable Gallery of Mirrors was now merely the vestibule of a death chamber. The triumphant paintings of Lebrun seemed darkened. The place of transports had changed its aspect; the modern Olympus was vanishing before the great Christian idea, and this King, "the terror of his neighbors, the astonishment of the universe, the father of kings, grander than all his ancestors, more magnificent than Solomon,"[1]

[1] Massillon, *Oraison funèbre de Louis le Grand.*

seemed to be saying with the Preacher: "I have surpassed in glory and in wisdom all those who have preceded me in Jerusalem, and I have recognized that even in this there was nothing but vanity and affliction of spirit."

During the last illness of him who had been the Sun-King, the court remained all day long in the Gallery of Mirrors. No one stopped in the Œil-de-Bœuf except the domestic servants and the physicians. As to Madame de Maintenon, in spite of her eighty years and her infirmities, she nursed the august invalid with great devotion, and often remained beside his bed for fourteen hours together. "The King bade me adieu three times," she related afterwards to the ladies of Saint-Cyr; "the first time, he said he had no regret but that of leaving me, but that we should soon see each other again; I begged him to think no longer of anything but God. The second, he asked me to pardon him for not having lived well enough with me; he added that he had not made me happy, but that he had always loved and esteemed me equally. He was weeping, and he asked if any one were present. I told him no; then he said: 'Even though they should hear me crying with you, no one would be surprised.' I went away so as not to do him any harm. The third time he said to me: 'What is going to become of you, for you have nothing?' I answered him: 'I am a nonentity; do not think of anything but God,' and I left him."

Louis XIV. deserved the name of Great until his

latest breath. He died still better than he had lived. All that was elevated, majestic, grandiose in this chosen soul is summed up in the final moment. His death is that of a king, a hero, and a saint. Like the first Christians, he made a sort of public confession; he said, August 26, 1715, to those who were admitted to his presence: "Gentlemen, I ask your pardon for the bad examples I have given you. I have to thank you much for the way in which you have served me, and the attachment and fidelity you have always shown for me. . . . I see that I am affected, and that I am affecting you also; I beg your pardon for it. Adieu, gentlemen; I rely upon your remembering me sometimes." He gave his blessing the same day to the little Dauphin, and addressed him in these beautiful words: "My dear child, you are going to be the greatest king of the world. Never forget your obligations to God. Do not imitate me in wars; try always to preserve peace with your neighbors, and to assist your people as much as you can, which I have had the misfortune not to be able to do on account of the necessities of the State. Always follow wise counsels, and remember well that it is to God you owe all that you are. I give you Père Letellier for confessor; follow his advice, and always remember the obligations which you owe to Madame de Ventadour."[1]

[1] M. Le Roi, in his work entitled *Curiosités historiques*, has proved that these were the exact terms employed by Louis XIV. in his address to Louis XV.

During the night of August 27–28, the dying man was seen joining his hands at every moment; he said his customary prayers, and at the *Confiteor* he smote his breast. In the morning of the 28th he saw in the mirror on his chimney piece two domestics who were shedding tears. "Why are you weeping?" he said to them; "did you think I was immortal?" An elixir intended to restore him to life was handed him. "To life or to death!" he answered, taking the glass; "all that pleases God." His confessor asked if he suffered much. "Eh! no," he replied, "that is what displeases me; I would like to suffer more in expiation of my sins." In giving his orders, August 29, he happened to speak of the Dauphin as the young king. And as he observed the movement it caused in those around him: "Eh! why?" he exclaimed, "that gives me no pain." This is what made Massillon say: "This monarch environed by such glory, and who saw around him so many objects capable of arousing his desires or his tenderness, cast not even one regretful glance on life. How grand is man when he is so through faith! . . . Vanity has never had more than the mask of grandeur; it is grace which is the reality."

During the daytime of August 29, the dying man lost consciousness, and it was thought he had but a few more hours to live. "You are no longer necessary to him," said his confessor to Madame de Maintenon; "you can go away." Marshal de Villeroy exhorted her not to remain any longer, and to go to

Saint-Cyr, where she could rest after so much emotion. He posted the King's guards along the road and lent her his carriage. "Some popular commotion may be feared," said he, "and possibly the road may not be safe." Madame de Maintenon, enfeebled, disturbed by age and sorrow, made the mistake of listening to such pusillanimous counsels. Posterity will always reproach her with a weakness unworthy of this woman of intelligence and feeling. There are positions which oblige. Madame de Maintenon ought to have closed the eyes of the great King, and prayed beside his corpse. The courtiers, who prescribed the resolutions of egoism and fear, are chiefly to be blamed. Ah! how they are abandoned, "the gods of flesh and blood, the gods of clay and dust," when they are going down to the grave. A few domestics alone lament them. The crowd is indifferent, or it rejoices. The courtiers turn toward the rising sun. Alas! what a contrast between the throne and the coffin! The death of a man is always a subject for philosophic reflections. What is it then, when he who dies has called himself Louis XIV.

August 30, the dying man returned to consciousness and asked for Madame de Maintenon. She was sent for to Saint-Cyr. She came back. The King recognized her, said a few more words, and then drowsed. In the evening she descended the marble staircase which she was never to ascend again, and went to Saint-Cyr to shut herself up forever.

On Saturday, August 31, towards eleven o'clock in the evening, the prayers for the dying were said for Louis XIV. He recited them himself in a louder voice than any of the spectators; and seemed still more majestic on his deathbed than on his throne. When the prayers were ended he recognized Cardinal de Rohan and said to him: "These are the last graces of the Church." Several times he repeated: "*Nunc et in hora mortis.* Now and at the hour of our death." Then he said: "O God, come unto mine aid; O Lord, make haste to help me." These were his last words. The agony was beginning. It lasted all night, and on Sunday, September 1, 1715, at a quarter past eight in the morning, Louis XIV., aged seventy-seven years lacking three days, during sixty-two of which he had been king, yielded his great soul to God.

One does not terminate the study of a memorable epoch without a sentiment of regret. After having lived for some time by the life of a celebrated personage, one suffers from his death, and is affected at his tomb. When reading Saint-Simon, does not one seem present at the death agony of Louis XIV., and feel the tears welling into his eyes as if he were mingling with the loyal servitors who are weeping for the best of masters and the greatest of kings?

As soon as the tidings of the death of Louis XIV. reached Saint-Cyr, Mademoiselle d'Aumale entered Madame de Maintenon's chamber. "Madame," said

she, "the whole house is at prayer, in the choir." Madame de Maintenon understood, she raised her hands to heaven, weeping, and then repaired to the church, where she was present at the office for the dead. Then she dismissed her servants, and got rid of her carriage, "unable," as she said, "to reconcile herself to feeding horses while so many young girls were in need." She lived in her modest apartment in profound peace. She submitted to the regulations of the house as far as her age permitted, and never went out except to go to the village to visit the sick and the poor. When Peter the Great went to Saint-Cyr, June 10, 1717, the illustrious octogenarian was suffering. The Czar sat down beside the bed of this woman whose name he had heard so often. He asked her, through an interpreter, if she were ill. She answered Yes. He wanted to know what her malady was. "A great old age," she replied.

Madame de Maintenon died at Saint-Cyr, August 15, 1719. For two days she remained exposed on her bed "with an air so sweet and so devout, that one would have said she was praying to God."[1] She was buried in the choir of the church. A modest slab of marble indicates the spot where her body reposes. It was there the novices went to weep and pray before dedicating themselves forever to the Lord.

Now that we have quitted Versailles, let us go

[1] *Mémoires des dames de Saint-Cyr.*

down into the crypts where lie these beautiful heroines, these famous women whose gracious figures we have endeavored to evoke. Mademoiselle de La Vallière rests at Paris in the Carmelite church of the rue Saint-Jacques; Queen Marie Thérèse, the two Duchesses of Orleans, the Bavarian dauphiness, and the Duchess of Burgundy at Saint-Denis. There they sleep their slumber, in those gloomy abodes where, as Bossuet says, the ranks are so crowded, so prompt is death to fill the places. There one should go to meditate, there to draw the conclusions from histories which have their lessons, there to listen to the great Christian maxim: *Memento homo quia pulvis es, et in pulverim reverteris.*

Bossuet says in speaking of the Pharaohs, that they did not even possess their sepulchres. Such was also the destiny of Louis XIV. This potentate who had given laws to Europe, did not even possess his tomb. The profaners of graves descended into the subterranean abode of "annihilated princes," and in spite of their rear-guard of eight centuries of kings, as Chateaubriand says, the great shade of Louis XIV. could not defend the majesty of sepulchres which all the world had deemed inviolable.

During the session of July 21, 1794, Barrère read to the Convention, in the name of the Committee of Public Safety, a long report in which he demanded, that in order to celebrate the anniversary of August Tenth, the mausoleums of Saint-Denis should be destroyed. "Under the monarchy," said he, "even

tombs had learned to flatter kings; royal pomp and pride could not be lessened on this theatre of death, and the sceptre bearers who have caused so many woes to France and to humanity seem still, even in the grave, to pride themselves on a vanished grandeur. The powerful hand of the Republic should pitilessly efface these mausoleums which recall the frightful memory of kings." The Convention carried by acclamation a decree conformable to this report. Considering that "the country was in danger and lacked cannons wherewith to defend itself," it decided that "the tombs of the former kings should be destroyed on the ensuing 10th of August." It appointed commissioners empowered to go to Saint-Denis for the purpose of proceeding "to the exhuming of the former kings and queens, princes and princesses," and decreed the breaking of the coffins in order to melt the lead, and send it to the national foundries.

This odious decree was strictly executed.[1] Kings, queens, princes, and princesses were torn from their sepulchres. The lead was carried, as fast as it was found, to a cemetery in which a foundry had been established, and the corpses were cast into the common grave. The vandalism of the revolutionists and the atheists took delight in this spectacle. Assuredly, as Chateaubriand writes, "God, in the effusion of

[1] See the interesting work of M. George d'Heylli, *Les Tombes royales de Saint-Denis.*

His wrath, had sworn by Himself to punish France. Seek not on earth the causes of such events; they are higher than that."

A few weeks later came the turn of Madame de Maintenon's dead body. In January, 1794, while the church of Saint-Cyr was being transformed into hospital wards, the workmen perceived a slab of black marble amidst the débris of the devastated choir. It was the tomb of Madame de Maintenon. They broke it, opened the vault, and taking out the body, dragged it into the court with dreadful yells and threw it, stripped and mutilated, into a hole in the cemetery. On that day the unrecognized spouse of Louis XIV. was treated like a queen!

Thus then, these illustrious heroines of Versailles, the good Marie Thérèse, the clever Maintenon, the melancholy Bavarian dauphiness, the haughty Princess Palatine, the alluring Duchess of Burgundy, were dispossessed of their tombs. Listening to the tale of such iconoclastic and sacrilegious rage, the heart contracts and feels the anguish of an inexpressible sadness. A sentiment of holy wrath against such odious profanations and savage furies blends with profound reflections on the nothingness of human things. More eloquent, more terrible than any funeral sermon, history assumes a sepulchral tone and speaks more forcibly than the preachers of the great century. The shades of these once flattered women come before us one after another, and as they pass each seems to say like Fénelon in his

book of prayers: "What does not one do to find a false happiness? What rebuffs, what thwartings does not one endure for a phantom of worldly glory? What pains for wretched pleasures of which nothing is left but remorse?" From the depths of the dust of graves profound, the dazzled eye suddenly perceives arising a pure, an incorruptible radiance which places in their true light all things here below, and one recalls the saying of Massillon before the coffin of Louis XIV.: "God alone is great, my brethren."

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